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# NEWS CLIPPINGS

**23 November 2018**

**Friday**



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# SENATE-HOUSE PANEL OKS RICE IMPORT TAX

STORY BY LEILA B. SALAVERRIA

The bill imposing rice tariffs aims to bring down the price of the staple and inflation. But a lawmaker says it would lead to a flood of imports that would hurt millions of Filipino farmers.

## FROM A1

By Leila B. Salaverria  
@LeilasINQ

A bicameral conference committee has approved a bill that imposes a tariff on rice aimed at bringing down the price of the staple and at reining in inflation, which has risen to a nine-year high over the past two months.

Tariff is a tax on imports.

Another bicameral committee also approved on Thursday the coco levy fund bill and the measure that strengthens the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA).

The removal of import caps is expected to reduce the retail price of rice by P4 to P7 per kilogram, economic managers earlier said.

Rice prices account for 10 percent of the country's inflation, which rose to 6.7 percent in September and October and contributed to declines in President Duterte's approval ratings.

Retail prices of the staple surged over the past few months amid the depleted buffer stock of the National Food Authority (NFA), triggering calls for its abolition. The NFA is tasked with stabilizing the supply and price of rice.

### Lifting caps

The bill liberalizes rice importation by removing quantitative restrictions and instead imposing a tariff—35 percent for rice from other members of the Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and 50 percent from non-Asean countries.

The Philippines imports rice largely from Vietnam and Thailand—both Asean members.

The government think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies expects the price of rice to decline due to improved supply and to competition among suppliers as a result of the imposition of tariff on imported rice.

All those who could get phytosanitary and sanitary

permits from the Bureau of Plant Industry and pay the tariffs could import rice, said Sen. Cynthia Villar, who led the Senate panel.

"We want to break the cartel," Villar told reporters.

She expects Congress to ratify the measure before the end of the year so it could be sent to the President, who had certified the measure as urgent, for his signature.

The Makabayan bloc in the House of Representatives on Wednesday said it would oppose the rice tariffication bill.

### Threat to livelihood

Anakpawis Rep. Ariel Casilao said once enacted, the bill

would be a "doomsday clock" to local rice farmers.

"Passing the rice tariffication would mean the avalanche of imported rice in our local market. It is meant to kill not only the local rice industry but also the livelihood of millions of local rice farmers," Casilao.

Casilao joined a rally by members of Anakpawis and Bantay Bigas near the Senate building in Pasay City to protest against the bill.

### P10-B fund

They said that instead of tariffication, it was better for the government to give greater production support to rice farmers to ensure a steady supply of the

staple and uplift the lives of farmers.

Revenue from the collection of tariffs on rice will go to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) that seeks to help Filipino farmers.

Villar, chair of the Senate committee on agriculture, said the P10-billion RCEF remained intact in the bill. "That is the most important," she said.

### Farm mechanization

The senator said the fund should ease the fears of farmers who worry that they would be unable to compete with the flood of imports.

The RCEF would be used to lower rice farmers' high labor

growers associations.

#### Low-interest credit

Ten percent of the fund would be available for credit for rice farmers, with minimal interest rates and minimum collateral requirements.

The remaining 10 percent would be used for extension services by PhilMech, Agricultural Training Institute and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

They would teach skills on rice crop production, modern rice farming techniques, seed production, farm mechanization, and knowledge or technology transfer through farm schools nationwide.

#### Diminished NFA role

Under the bill, the NFA would have a diminished role in rice importation. Its new task would be to buy rice from local farmers for the country's buffer stock, as specified in the final version, Villar said.

Another bicameral committee also approved the final versions of the coco levy fund bill and the measure that strengthens the PCA.

The bicameral version of the coco levy fund bill was ratified in August, but this was recalled in October for additional "major" changes.

The bill allocates P10 billion a year for the coconut industry through the PCA, and P5 billion a year on programs for coconut farmers.

It puts the coconut levy fund, which was sourced from the tax that the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos imposed on coconut farmers, into a trust fund.

The changes in the bill have to do with the inclusion of a sunset provision and the composition of the council that would manage the fund.

Villar said the council would be composed of eight representatives from the government, six representatives from farmers' groups and one representative from the private sector.

—WITH REPORTS FROM JEROME ANING AND INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ

costs to make them competitive, Villar said.

The P10-billion fund would be used to mechanize their processes to bring down labor costs and provide them seeds that would increase their harvest.

Half of the amount would go to the Philippine Center for Post Harvest Development and Modernization to provide farmers' associations and cooperatives with rice farm machinery and equipment.

From the fund, 30 percent would be given to the Philippine Rice Research Institute for the development, propagation and promotion of inbred seeds to rice farmers, and for the organization of rice farmers into seed

# Duterte fires HUDCC exec for corruption

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte is not yet done with his firing spree and the latest to get the boot is Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) secretary-general Falconi Millar because of alleged irregularities in the agency.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo told "The Chiefs" on Signal TV's *One News* yesterday about Millar's sacking. In a statement released after his interview in the talk show, he said Millar's dismissal was proof that no one would be spared from Duterte's anti-corruption campaign.

"There are no sacred cows in the administration, especially in its drive against corruption. As the President said, he will not tolerate even a whiff of corruption in the executive branch of government," Panelo said. "The President's order takes effect immediately."

The HUDCC has a council headed by its chairman Eduardo del Rosario, a regular member of the Cabinet. The council is supported

by the secretariat, which is led by a secretary-general tasked to execute and administer approved policies and measures.

Aside from being HUDCC secretary-general, Millar was also secretariat head of Task Force Bangon Marawi, which is in charge of Marawi City rehabilitation.

In his speech last Friday in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, Duterte said he would dismiss another official when he returns to the Philippines but did not elaborate.

Panelo said the delivery of public services, especially the rehabilitation of Marawi and other areas affected by the clashes between government troops and terrorists, would

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# Duterte

From Page 1

"unimpededly continue" despite the dismissal.

Millar, for his part, said he resigned from his post and that there was a "demolition job" against him by people he had "annoyed" because he protected the government's interests.

Duterte himself also announced Millar's removal from HUDCC in a speech during the inauguration of the Cavite Gateway Terminal in Tanza town.

"For all of you, disabuse your mind about corruption

in government at least here in the executive department. *Wala ho kami niyan* (We do not have such thing)," the President said.

"Just before I left my office, I signed a dismissal order of the secretary-general of housing. A certain Millar. I read his resume earlier and I saw the termination, I knew what a deep s\*\*\* the guy has created for... Valedictorian in law class and everything. But I don't know," he added.

Duterte said he has seen a lot of people who used their

power to commit corruption.

"Along the way, corruption creeps in... You know when you are there secretary-general, you have the power, you have the authority. You can do corruption and it can corrupt you, give you a little or it corrupts you absolutely. Sometimes it is really you want your money to go to your pocket almost every day," the President said.

"That's the sad story about this government," he added.

Duterte also cited his firing of officials of the Armed Forces of the Medical Center and the Navong Pilipino Foundation.

"Frankly I am having a hard

time combating corruption. Please do not make it really very hard for me to do it," he added.

In the same event, Duterte endorsed the senatorial bid of his former aide Christopher Go, who he described as an "ideal critic."

"Please do not forget him. He is good. He would be an ideal critic and I would say that he would win, he should only spare no one including his former boss," the President said.

Duterte also ordered policemen to stay away from casinos, which he described as "crawling with usurers, kidnappers."

"Better go away. I do not want even a police car there...

The lowlife of society are there. They kidnap people and then they start to negotiate. Even if they

get the payment, they would kill the victim. And what are the policemen doing there? What's your business?" he said.

"If you violate my order, I will dismiss you from the service. That's an order because you are there to commit a crime."

Duterte said he would ask the Army's Scout Rangers to conduct patrols in Roxas Boulevard if he sees policemen in casinos and loses his patience.

# Phi free to rescind oil deal with China

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The Philippines is free to walk out of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) on joint oil and gas development with China if the contents of the document would be found to be against national interests, Malacañang said yesterday.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo gave the assurance as senators and some groups were demanding full disclosure of the details of the MOU signed during the recent visit of Chinese president Xi Jinping.

"Why not? Yes, definitely," Panelo said when asked if the Philippines could still walk out of the MOU.

"If serious studies show it's wrong, you know, in law there is such a thing as rescission of contract. If the contents of the contract do not contain the intention of the parties, you can rescind it," he pointed out.

He said any deal should always be favorable to the Philippines, and not just to China.

Panelo said the MOU only means that the Philippines and China have "agreed to agree" on certain matters about oil and gas exploration and development.

He said the MOU is not legally binding as the two parties are not yet done negotiating on the matter.

The signing of the MOU, he explained, means guidelines and talking points will be worked out, which will lead to an official agreement.

"The predicate is: is this agreement legal as far as we are concerned, under the Constitution? Number two: is this beneficial to us? Otherwise we won't allow it," he added.

"After that draft, it has to go over the other party and will look over whether or not the contents of your agreement are incorporated therein. Otherwise, the party will object to that or will revise it until they reach an agreement on what exactly will be the final draft," he said in a chance interview.

Panelo said it is premature to criticize the MOU, which is one of 29 deals signed at Malacañang during Xi's visit.

The administration has not yet released copies of the MOU.

"I suppose it's the DFA (Department of Foreign Affairs) secretary who will be releasing that. So we'll have to ask him," Panelo said, referring to DFA chief Teodoro Locsin Jr.

Former foreign affairs secretary Albert del Rosario said he and acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio were able to see "the signed document which is being referred to."

Del Rosario said Carpio believes "that what was signed is an agreement to negotiate an oil and gas cooperation, and we are safe with it. Nothing is being given away."

But Del Rosario stressed the need for "full transparency," adherence to the Constitution and upholding of the outcome of the international arbitration.

Asked whether the arbitral ruling that favored the Philippines would be considered in the negotiations with China,

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Panelo said: "As I have repeatedly said, the arbitral ruling is there forever, permanently. Nobody can take that away from us."

The Permanent Court of Arbitration based in The Hague voided China's expansive maritime claim in 2016 but the Chinese government refused to recognize the ruling, which stemmed from a complaint filed by the previous Aquino administration in 2013.

### Careful study

Panelo emphasized a joint development would take time to materialize as it has to be carefully studied to make sure it complies with existing laws.

"We have to be very sure that one, it is constitutionally firm, number two, will we benefit from that?" the presidential spokesman said, adding a draft agreement would be subject to further scrutiny.

Panelo said President Duterte would lift the moratorium on all exploration and drilling works in the West Philippine Sea if advised by the DFA to do so.

The moratorium, implemented in 2012 during the Aquino administration, covered service contracts 72 in Recto Bank, a gas-rich area 80 nautical miles from Palawan, and 75 in northwest Palawan.

"If the recommendation of the SFA (secretary of foreign affairs) and the President thinks it is best suited to pursue and make forward our interests, he will do it," he said.

"The President listens to advice and recommendations coming from members of his Cabinet," Panelo said.

"But ultimately it's the President's call and always based on whether or not it is for the best of the country."

Locsin, meanwhile, emphasized that the signed MOU would not jumpstart a joint exploration with China, saying it's just an "architecture" for future talks on oil exploration.

In an interview on CNN Philippines' "The Source," Locsin said the agreement does not specify the location of the oil and gas exploration and that it only creates a joint intergovernmental steering committee and one or more working groups to help Manila and Beijing come to an agreement within 12 months from the signing of the MOU.

But if the deadline lapses without the parties' reaching an agreement, the MOU will remain valid.

"This is valid and it will endure. This is the master framework," Locsin said. "No other country is interested in the development." He revealed it was he who wrote the MOU.

"I decided I'm going to write that agreement, and the Chinese and that's why I'm going to ask for their permission to release this, I'm not going to listen to anyone else because they trusted me enough to produce a memorandum of understanding, more or less along the way, New York lawyers would do it, no-nonsense, straight to the point, hardly any comments," he said.

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## Phl free

From Page 7

Locsin co-chairs the committee with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi. Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi and his Chinese counterpart are the designated vice chairpersons.

The committee "will be responsible for negotiating and agreeing the cooperation arrangements in maritime areas to which they will apply, and deciding the number of working groups to be established and for which part of the cooperation area each working group is established," Locsin said.

"Each working group will negotiate and agree on inter-entrepreneurial, technical and commercial arrangements

that will apply in the relevant working area," he added.

China authorizes China National Offshore Oil Corp. as the Chinese enterprise in each working group.

"The Philippines will authorize other enterprises because that's how we do things, with service contracts, by giving them service contracts, or the Philippine National Oil Co."

The MOU, he said, does not create rights or obligations under international or domestic law. Nature of information is confidential and any other matters relating to the memorandum may be referred jointly by the two governments to the committee or working group for consultation.

- With Pia Lee-Brago

## Drilon seeks review of 29 Phi-China deals

Saying the questionable Northrail and NBN-ZTE broadband projects are still fresh in the nation's mind, Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon has joined his colleagues' call for a review of the 29 deals the Philippines signed with China during the recent visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"The controversies involving these two (previous) multi-million-dollar Philippine government undertakings with China are too recent to be forgotten," Drilon said yesterday.

"Taking into account the grossly disadvantageous contracts that the government had previously signed with China, it is imperative that we scrutinize these new deals to assess whether the agreements are consistent with the Constitution and our laws," he stressed.

Documents signed include a memorandum of understanding on joint oil and gas exploration in the West Philippine Sea.

The \$421-million Northrail project and the \$329-million NBN-ZTE broadband project were reportedly fraught with irregularities and had to be abandoned.

Drilon said there should be absolute transparency in

any agreement involving the exploration of the country's natural resources.

He explained that exploration, development and utilization of natural resources should be under the full control and supervision of the state.

"All lands of the public domain, waters, minerals, coal, petroleum and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy, fisheries, forests or timber, wildlife, flora and fauna, and other natural resources are owned by the State," he said, quoting the Constitution.

"All agreements that may involve exploration of natural resources should comply with the nationality requirement of the Constitution," he pointed out.

"The state may directly undertake activities, or it may enter into co-production, joint venture, or production-sharing agreements with Filipino citizens, or corporations or associations at least 60 percent of whose capital is owned by such citizens," he said.

"We will be vigilant in scrutinizing these agreements," the Senate minority leader said. "We are prepared to go to court on this."

- Cecille Suerte Felipe,  
Paolo Romero //

## Drilon urges scrutiny of 29 deals with China

SENATE Minority Leader Franklin Drilon on Thursday said the multi-million dollar North Luzon Railways (Northrail) and National Broadband

Network (NBN)-ZTE projects that were to be funded by China are too recent to be forgotten, as he cited the need to scrutinize the 29 deals and

bilateral agreements that the Duterte administration signed with Beijing this week.

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### DEAL FROM A1

## Drilon urges scrutiny of 29 deals with China

Taking into account the allegedly disadvantageous Northrail and NBN-ZTE contracts that the Arroyo administration had signed with China, Drilon called for scrutinizing the deals and agreements that President Rodrigo Duterte

signed with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Xi ended his two-day state visit to the Philippines on Wednesday.

An assessment of whether the deals and agreements are consistent with the Philippine Constitution is in order, accord-

ing to Drilon.

The aborted \$421-million Northrail project, which Drilon fiercely opposed for being grossly overpriced, and the controversial \$329-million NBN-ZTE deal were two of the biggest that the country signed with China.

The Northrail project was supposed to link the northern part of Metro Manila to the Clark International Airport in Pampanga, north of Manila.

But the rail deal was suspend-

ed in March 2010 pending review of the contract with China National Machinery Industry Corp. (Sinomach).

In 2012, the contract was dropped after China called off the overseas development assistance or ODA fund for the project.

The NBN-ZTE deal invited allegations of corruption in the awarding of the contract to Chinese telecommunications firm ZTE for the proposed government-managed NBN.

JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

# PH, China to set up panel for joint exploration deal

By Leila B. Salaverria  
@LeilasINO

The memorandum of understanding signed by the Philippines and China on Tuesday would set up a body that would work on an agreement for joint exploration of energy sources in the South China Sea, according to Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., who said it was he who drafted the document and not China.


During an interview on CNN Philippines on Thursday, Locsin read portions of the "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation of Oil and Gas Development Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines" and described it as a memorandum "to agree to arrive at an agreement."

Malacañang gave assurance on Thursday that that agreement would be constitutional and beneficial to Filipinos.

## Constitutional

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo told reporters that the Philippine government would not accept a deal that would violate the Constitution. "It should be favorable to us, not only to China," he said.

Locsin and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi signed the memorandum of understanding in Malacañang during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to the Philippines on Tuesday. Xi



**The committee will be responsible for negotiating and agreeing [to] the cooperation arrangements in maritime areas to which they will apply ...**

**Teodoro Locsin Jr.**  
Foreign Secretary

and President Duterte oversaw the signing of the document.

The plan is for the Chinese and Philippine governments to establish an "intergovernmental joint steering committee" and one or more "interentrepreneurial working groups," Locsin said.

The committee would be chaired by the foreign ministries of both countries and would include relevant agencies, while the working groups would have representatives from enterprises authorized by the two governments, he said.

"The committee will be responsible for negotiating and agreeing [to] the cooperation arrangements in maritime areas to which they will apply, and deciding the number of working groups to be established and for which part of the cooperation area each working group is established," he said, reading from the document.

The working groups would

negotiate and agree on interentrepreneurial, technical and commercial arrangements that would apply in the relevant working area, he added.

According to the document, China would designate China National Offshore Oil Corp. as the Chinese enterprise of each working group.

The Philippines would authorize Philippine National Oil Co. or other enterprises that have service contracts.

"The two governments will endeavor to agree on the cooperation arrangements within 12 months of this memorandum of agreement," Locsin said.

He said he put in the 12-month period to make it "more concrete."

The document also states that all discussions, activities and negotiations of the two governments or their authorized enterprises would be

"without prejudice to the respective legal positions of both governments," he said.

"This memorandum of understanding does not create rights or obligations under international or domestic law," he said.

The document cites the charter of the United Nations, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

It acknowledges that the two governments have made "substantial progress and meaningful gains in exploring opportunities and means to cooperate with each other in maritime activities, which has made significant contributions to peace, stability and development in the region," Locsin said.

This means the parties agree to the limitations on what states can do and cannot do, he added.

## 60-40 split

As for the 60-40 profit sharing, he said the working groups would handle the matter.

There is also a moratorium on oil exploration in the West Philippine Sea, and Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi would need authorization from the President before this could be lifted, he said.

West Philippine Sea is the local name of the waters within the Philippines' 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea. —WITH A REPORT FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO INQ

# Phil to discuss joint exploration with China in disputed waters

By DANESSA RIVERA

After the signing of the Philippines-China cooperation on joint oil and gas development, the Department of Energy (DOE) will discuss with its Chinese counterpart a plan to pursue joint exploration in the disputed waters.

In the meantime, the agency will start accepting bids and nominations to develop oil and gas prospects within the country's exclusive territory, its top official said.

In a briefing yesterday, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi said that there was no definite plan for the joint oil and gas development in the West Philippine Sea yet.

He said the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jin Ping is an "important step" toward the direction of joint development to be able to tap resources in disputed waters.

"There is no joint exploration yet... that's a memorandum of cooperation to explore ways on how we can harness the indigenous resources at West Philippine Sea. But we're not there yet since we have yet to discuss it," the DOE chief said.

With the signing, the DOE, together with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), will have to sit down with Chinese counterparts to further discuss plans on how to pursue such undertaking, Cusi said.

"For that MOU, we have to sit down immediately and come out with our position and we should do it, if I remember it right, within a period of no more than one year," Cusi said.

"That is for us to come out with ways to harness the resources, or do a joint development or joint exploration," he said.

In line with the MOU, the DOE is also working on lifting the moratorium imposed on exploration and drilling works in December 2014 and 2015 amid rising maritime tension with China at that time.

Turn to B12

## Phil to discuss... From B11

The energy chief said the DOE is working with the DFA and other relevant government agencies to resolve that problem.

"There's also urgency to that but we don't want to impose a timeline that is not within our control because there are other factors we have to consider. But what I can tell you, we are working, moving with urgency. The President is pushing us to solve the problem," he said.

Meanwhile, the DOE launched the Philippine Conventional Energy Contracting Program (PCECP) yesterday, where interested oil and gas exploration companies can start vying for 14 pre-determined areas (PDAs) or begin nominating areas for development within the territorial waters.

"What we are promoting today, the 14 PDAs, are within the exclusive Philippine territory... these areas are areas without conflict as far as territory or sovereignty is concerned," Cusi said.

This as the Philippines needs new energy sources amid the increasing power demand, depleting indigenous resources and adverse impact of volatile international markets.

"We can no longer be complacent and subject ourselves to the volatility of the global oil markets. It is high time we establish a sustainable petroleum exploration and development program," Cusi said.

The new petroleum contracting program also aims to address the lack of petroleum exploration in the country.

# Locsin: MOU on joint exploration anchored on mutual respect, benefit

By ROY C. MABASA

Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. on Thursday said he will seek permission from China in releasing the copy of the signed memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Manila and Beijing on the joint exploration of oil and gas in the South China Sea or the West Philippine Sea.

"Not that they're asking me to get

permission but I think I owe it to China to have trusted me implicitly to write it as I wanted it," Locsin said as he showed a copy of the agreement during an interview over CNN Philippines.

Locsin admitted he drafted the MOU on the joint exploration that was signed during the state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Manila on November 20.

He described the content **► 8**

# Locsin: MOU on...

of the agreement as "no-nonsense, straight to the point," a legal document "just like New York lawyers would do."

Locsin said the document is anchored on the basic principle of mutual respect, fairness, mutual benefit, flexibility, and pragmatism.

"It's a context that means we're looking at this agreement under the charter of the UN (United Nations), the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), Declaration of Conduct of the Parties, and it's with full awareness of the limitations that puts on what states can and cannot do in the areas," he explained.

According to the DFA chief, the agreement is actually a "working mechanism" that would pave the way for the two governments to establish an inter-governmental joint steering committee, and one or more inter-entrepreneurial working groups.

## MOU details

Under the provisions of the agreement, the committee will be co-chaired by the foreign ministries of both sides and co-chaired by the vice ministries, with the participation of relevant agencies on the two government.

Each working group will consist of representatives from enterprises authorized by the two governments.

The committee will be responsible for negotiating and agreeing on the cooperation arrangements and maritime areas which they will apply, and deciding the number of working groups to be established, and or which part of the cooperation area, each working group

is established.

Locsin, however, said, the choice of where to conduct the exploration -- whether in the South China Sea or the West Philippines Sea -- will be decided by the working groups subject to the concurrence of the mother committee, which is the foreign ministries of Manila and Beijing.

As stipulated in the agreement, each working group will negotiate and agree on the inter-entrepreneurial, technical and commercial arrangements that will apply in the relevant working area.

Chinese Counsellor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi will co-chair the committee with Locsin.

On the exploration aspect, Beijing has authorized the State-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation while the Philippines has yet to authorize and name "other enterprises" with service contracts, or the Philippine National Oil Company.

## Lift moratorium

Locsin said the two governments will "endeavor" to agree on the cooperation arrangements within 12 months of the MOU.

One of the remaining hurdles in order for the joint exploration to move forward is to lift the existing moratorium on oil exploration works in the disputed areas in the South China Sea.

With the signing of the MOU, Locsin said it is now up to Energy Secretary to decide and seek authorization from President Duterte to lift the existing moratorium which took effect in 2014 at the height of the arbitration case

filed by the Philippines against China before the UN-backed Arbitral Tribunal in The Hague.

Earlier, the DOE identified 14 pre-determined areas for potential oil and gas exploration and development activities, namely: Cagayan Basin, three in Eastern Palawan, three in Sulu, two in Agusan-Davao, one in Cotabato, and four in Western Luzon.

Nevertheless, Locsin pointed out that the MOU will always be valid since it will govern how the two sides will arrive at agreements when the moratorium is lifted.

"That will stand for the next four years unless someone some decides, either party decides. I'm trying to make it concrete by saying let's get moving within 12 months," he said.

## Not a contract

Meanwhile, Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said government can rescind any formal agreement on possible energy exploration with China if its contents would be detrimental to national interest.

Panelo said the government would ensure that any contract on oil and gas exploration would be "constitutionally firm" and beneficial to the nation otherwise, it will not agree to such deal.

He assured that the two countries would "enter into an agreement based on mutual respect, mutual trust, and mutual respect on sovereign aspect."

Panelo explained the MOU is not yet a contract, adding the two parties merely "agreed to agree" on possible oil and cooperation. The two sides would still conduct negotiations before any formal pact is finalized. (With a report from Genalyn D. Kabiling)

## Trillanes' MoU fake – Locsin

By Mario J. Mallari

Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV was again discredited after being exposed yesterday by Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. he presented a bogus document in an effort to demonize President Rodrigo Duterte during the landmark visit of People's Republic of China President Xi Jinping. Locsin junked a "Chinese draft" supposedly on

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# Trillanes' MoU fake – Locsin

Locsin flashed a copy of the MoU and stressed that he was the one who personally wrote the document and approved by the Chinese

*From page 1*

the planned joint exploration of gas and oil between the Philippines and China in the disputed West Philippine Sea (WPS) leaked by Trillanes, stressing he personally wrote the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

For the first time, Locsin flashed a copy of the MoU and stressed he was the one who personally wrote the document and approved by the Chinese.

"When I wrote this draft, I did it myself. There's supposed to be a Chinese draft, but the one Trillanes issued is not it," said Locsin in an interview with CNN-Philippines.

Locsin explained the "Chinese draft" leaked by Trillanes looks very far from the Chinese draft shown to him.

"There was a Chinese proposal, but it's (the one leaked by Trillanes) not it, not at all," Locsin said.

## Different draft

The Chinese draft he saw, Locsin said, was formatted at font with "14 to 16 points, triple space."

The Foreign Affairs secretary said he finished the draft during the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Singapore and wanted to give it to his Chinese counterpart Foreign Minister Wang Yi, but handed it over instead to Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez.

Locsin's document is entitled "Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation on Oil and Gas Development between the governments of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Philippines."

On the other hand, the document leaked by Trillanes was entitled "Framework Agreement on Joint Maritime Oil and Gas Exploration between China and the Philippines."

## Document up for release

Locsin stressed under "his" MoU, the Philippines and China agreed to uphold the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Declaration of Conduct of Parties among claimant-countries.

"It's with full awareness of the limitations that puts on what states can and cannot do in the area. And then the basic principle is, of course, mutual respect, fairness, mutual benefit, flexibility, pragmatism," Locsin said.

He also pointed out the MoU was an "agreement to agree."

"I will release this when I get permission from China, not that they're asking me to get permission, but I think I owe it to China to have trust in me, implicitly, to write this, as I wanted it," Locsin said.

Locsin came out with the document amid calls from various sectors, particularly from critics of the Duterte administration, to

publicly release the MoU signed by the government with the Chinese in connection with the planned gas and oil exploration in the WPS.

According to Locsin, he will readily provide copies of the MoU to the senators if they ask for it.

## Everything to gain

Locsin's predecessor, Alan Peter Cayetano, stressed the Philippines will have everything to gain and nothing to lose in a proposed joint exploration agreement with China.

This follows after the governments of China and the Philippines signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation on oil and gas development in areas, including the WPS, during the visit of China President Xi Jinping.

Cayetano explained he separated the articulation of oil and gas exploration from its development because the latter would be a "complicated" matter that would need lawyers with this specific expertise when he was drafting the statement of principles used as a basis for the deal.

## A game changer

"Right now, let's see first. This is a game changer for us. We lose nothing and gain everything," said Cayetano in a televised interview. "All these people who say that something will be lost, there is nothing to be lost."

The former Foreign Affairs chief said the government cannot do a "document dump" and release everything all at once this quickly, emphasizing "there is a process" to be followed. He insisted critics were only "speculating" that there was a clause in the memorandum that Chinese laws would apply if it falls through.

Cayetano stressed it is not true the Philippines' natural resources would be the collateral in these deals.

With Elmer N. Manuel

# No joint exploration yet in West Philippine Sea

BY JORDEENE B. LAGARE

**F**OLLOWING reports about the possible resumption of exploration in the West Philippine Sea, the Department of Energy (DoE) stressed on Thursday that the governments of the Philippines and China had yet to fine-tune details on the search for resources in the disputed territory.

In a press briefing, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi said officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and DoE would "sit down immediately" with their Chinese counterparts on "how to move forward" following the signing of an agreement between the two states earlier this week.

"There's no joint exploration yet. That is a memorandum of cooperation to explore ways on how we can harness the indigenous resources in the West Philippine Sea," Cusi told reporters after the formal launch of the Philippine

Conventional Energy Contracting Program (PCECP) in Taguig City yesterday.

The accord signed was to devise schemes on the exploration, development, and exploitation of resources in the area in question, Cusi said. Discussions on how to explore the West Philippine Sea should wrap up within a year from the date of the signing of the deal, he said.

"That is for us to come up with ways to harness the resources, to do a joint development or exploration. We have to come up with the ways..." he added.

On Tuesday, the Philippine and Chinese governments signed 29 agreements, including oil and gas development, at the beginning of Chinese President Xi Jinping's two-day state visit to the country last November 20.

During the Chinese leader's first state visit to Manila, Xi and President Duterte witnessed the signing of the accords between both countries.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. and Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi signed the memorandum of understanding (MOU) on cooperation on oil and gas development between the Foreign Service Institute of the Philippines and the China Foreign Affairs University.

Beijing has expressed its willingness to enter into a 60-40 joint exploration arrangement with Manila. Under the proposed arrangement, the Philippines will receive 60 percent of the oil and natural gas deposits while Beijing will get the remaining 40 percent.

Cusi noted the MOU does not cover the profit sharing between both countries. But the existing law prescribes a 60-40 profit sharing in favor of the Philippine company.

To recall, the government, under former President Benigno Aquino, through the Energy Department, imposed a moratorium on all exploration and drilling works in Service Contracts 72 and 75 in December 2014 and 2015, respectively, amid the intensifying maritime tension with Beijing.

Cusi made the pronouncement as Vice President Leni Robredo and some lawmakers urged the Duterte administration to reveal details of the China-Philippines accord.

"Other than transparency on the bilateral agreements, we urge the administration to stand firm and exert all diplomatic means to assert our sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea, consistent with our historic victory before the arbitral tribunal more than two years ago," Robredo had said. **h2**

## Energy prepares to issue guidelines on joint oil exploration

THE Department of Energy expects to come out with the guidelines for the joint Philippines-China oil and gas exploration in the West Philippine Sea within one year, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi said.

The Philippines and China agreed to cooperate on oil and gas development as part of the deals forged during the Manila visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"[Under] that MOU [memorandum of understanding], we have to sit down immediately and come out with our position and we should do it if I remember it right within a period of no more than one year. That is for us to come out with

ways to harness the resources, or do a joint development or joint exploration," Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi said.

Cusi said the agreement focused on how to move forward with a joint cooperation to explore for oil and gas reserves in the disputed areas. No joint exploration agreement, however, was signed.

"Under the MOU, the conflicted area, we are talking about how to develop ways, on how are we going to explore, develop, exploit the resources there," the energy chief said.

"[The] DFA [Department of Foreign Affairs] and DoE will sit down with Chinese counterparts and further dis-

cuss what will be done," he said.

Cusi also raised the urgency of lifting the moratorium on oil and gas exploration in the disputed areas.

"We want to lift it...but as we do so, we do not want to create problems that we may not be able to handle. There's also urgency to that but we don't want to impose a timeline that is not within our control because there are other factors we have to consider...The president is pushing us to solve the problem," he said.

Cusi cited the need to develop the country's indigenous resources to reduce the country's dependence on imported fuels. **Alena Mae S. Flores**

# DFA defends China oil deal

*'MOU serves as basis for future exploration talks'*

By Nat Mariano, Rey E. Requejo and Macon Ramos-Araneta

**A**DMITTING that he drafted the oil exploration deal with China, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said the memorandum of understanding for joint oil and gas development between Philippines and China would uphold the constitutionally-mandated 60-40 profit sharing.

The MOU, he added, would serve as the basis for future talks on oil and resources exploration with Beijing but did

not specify how profits would be split. This provision was not included in the MOU because the task would be handled

by working committees provided under the agreement.

In an interview with CNN Philippines, Locsin said the MOU will create a joint intergovernmental steering committee, with one or more working groups, to aid both Manila and Beijing to come to an agreement within 12 months of the MOU's signing.

"This memorandum of understanding, in all discussions, negotiations, and

*Next page*

## DFA...

From A1

activities of the two governments, other authorized enterprises under or pursuant to this memorandum of understanding will be without prejudice to the respective legal positions of both governments. This memorandum of understanding does not create rights or obligations under international or domestic law," he said.

Locsin also said it was not President Rodrigo Duterte who pushed for the oil and gas deal with China in the disputed waters of West Philippine Sea.

He refused to say who pushed for the agreement, however, saying only that it was "within the government."

"There wasn't any deal. In fact, even in, well, frankly, it wasn't being pushed by the President, but there were forces there saying we should come to an understanding, so there," Locsin said.

In a Twitter post earlier, Locsin said the DFA had "zero knowledge" of the deal.

On Tuesday, Locsin and Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi exchanged the signed agreement entitled "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation on Oil and Gas Development between the Philippines and China."

The MOU will create a body—chaired by the DFA and the Chinese Foreign Ministry—to study the possible joint exploration of the West Philippine Sea.

Both the Philippines and China set a 12-month deadline "to agree on the cooperation arrangements."

Locsin then said that no Philippine company has been chosen yet for the oil exploration because of an existing moratorium imposed in 2012. He said he could lift the moratorium, but would need a go-signal from the President.

The deal on oil and gas exploration was among 29 agreements signed by the two countries during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit this week.

China National Offshore Oil Corp. or

CNOOC will serve as the "Chinese enterprise," while Manila will authorize its Filipino counterpart from those with service contracts in the area.

In March, PXP Energy said its chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan sent feelers to the CNOOC for possible joint exploration in the disputed South China Sea.

Senator Francis Escudero reiterated his call for the government to make public details of the agreements signed with China, particularly the one on oil and gas exploration.

Escudero recalled that during the Arroyo administration, the Philippines, China and Vietnam entered into an agreement to jointly conduct oil offshore exploration covering both disputed and undisputed waters, also known as the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking.

However, he said, the agreement was between the countries' respective oil companies.

He warned that the MOU could have implications on the Philippines' claims in the West Philippine Sea.

Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto said if the Senate will start floor debates on the 2019 national budget next month, then Cabinet members might be called upon to provide particulars of any of the 29 deals signed during Xi's state visit.

"More so if the agreement binds us to a project which will be financed by loans, enlarges the national debt, or requires large budgetary counterpart requiring yearly appropriations. Is the project really needed by the people? Or is it supplier driven?" he said.

The price tag of these commitments, he said, must be explained, as well as the benefits to the public. If these are grants and interest-free loans, then the Senate will be advised as well so that it can convey its thanks.

Senator Panfilo Lacson, on the other hand, said it was unfair to accuse President Duterte of having sold the country to the Chinese.

Until and unless the executive makes public the MOUs and MOAs signed during Xi's state visit, it is premature to draw conclusions, Lacson added.

# Duterte to visit China in April

BY GENALYN D. KARILING

President Duterte is expected to visit China in April, 2019, after accepting "with pleasure" the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping for him to attend the second Belt and Road Forum.

The President's visit to China comes in the heels of revitalized bilateral friendship and cooperation between the Philippines and China following the two-day state visit to Manila of

President Xi.

This will be Duterte's fourth visit to China since he assumed office in 2016. His last visit to China was in April, 2018 to attend the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference.

"The two sides agree that the milestone visit of President Xi Jinping has contributed to the advancement of friendship and cooperation between China and the Philippines," a joint statement of the leaders read.

"President Xi Jinping appre ▶ 8

## Duterte to visit...



ciated the warm and friendly hospitality accorded to him and his delegation by President Duterte and the Philippine government, and extended an invitation to President Duterte to attend the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation to be held in Beijing, China in April 2019. President Duterte accepted the invitation with pleasure," it added.

Duterte held bilateral talks with Xi in Malacanang last Tuesday and agreed to elevate the Philippine-China relations into a "comprehensive strategic cooperation." They also discussed China's multibillion dollar infrastructure program that seeks to revive the ancient trade links between Asia, Africa, and Europe.

The memorandum of understanding on cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative was among the 29 agreements

forged by the two nations during Xi's visit.

Xi earlier said he and Duterte had a "friendly" and "productive" meeting and agreed to forge closer cooperation on trade and investments and infrastructure development.

"I have extended a sincere invitation to President Duterte to attend the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation which China will host next year to discuss China-Philippines cooperation," Xi said.

"The two sides will seek greater complementarity between China's Belt and Road initiative and the Philippines' development strategy, move forward cooperation around the three pillars of security, development, and people-to-people ties, and then make our cooperation more comprehensive and balanced," he added.

# China building on new reef in South China Sea – US think tank

**B**EIJING (Reuters) – China has installed a new platform on a remote part of the Paracel Islands in the disputed South China Sea which could be used for military purposes, according to recent satellite images reviewed by a US think tank.

The strategic waterway is claimed almost in its entirety by China, whose continued building of military and other installations on artificial islands and reefs there has unnerved the region and angered Washington.

The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative of Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies said the images showed a "modest new structure" on Bombay Reef, topped by a radome and solar panels.

"The development is interesting given Bombay Reef's strategic location, and the possibility that the structure's rapid deployment could be repeated in other parts of the South China Sea," the group said in a statement on Tuesday.

The purpose of the platform and radome was unclear, but it could be for military use, it said.

"The reef is directly adjacent to the major shipping lanes that run between the Paracels and the Spratly Islands to the south, making it an attractive location for a sensor array to extend Chinese radar or signals intelligence collection over that important sea lane," the group said.

China's Defense Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China's sovereignty over the Paracel Islands was not in dispute, and there is nothing wrong with China carrying out construction work on its own territory.

"As for the specific

situation you mention, I have no understanding of it," Geng told a daily news briefing.

Separately, an influential state-run paper said on Wednesday that China should put more focus on building civilian facilities on islands in the South China Sea and less emphasis on the military to soothe regional fears about China's intentions.

In a commentary, China's Study Times said there was a "potential risk of war" for areas surrounding the country such as the South China Sea.

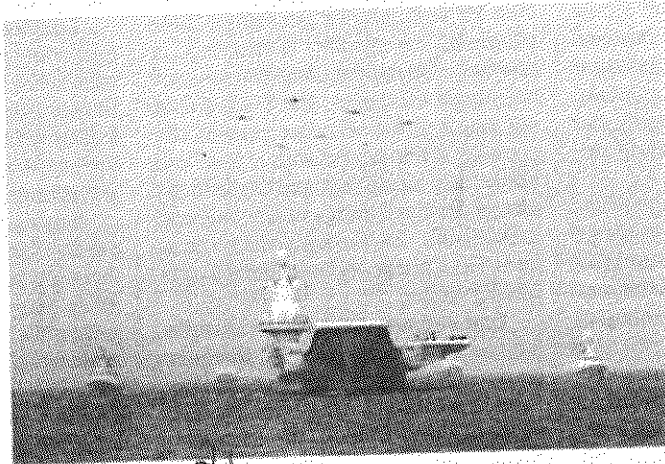
"Unprecedented outside military interference is the biggest threat to peace and stability in the South China Sea," said the paper published by the Central Party School which trains rising officials.

"Without the strong deterrence power of our military in the South China Sea, then protecting regional peace and stability is merely idle theorizing and falls short of what we would wish."

But there must be a greater role for non-military actors in the South China Sea, it added.

"Facilities on the reefs and islands of the South China Sea should be more civilian and less military," the paper wrote.

That means there should be more focus on building lighthouses, civilian airports, maritime search and rescue, scientific research and weather forecasting, it added.



Warships and fighter jets of Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy take part in a military display in the South China Sea April 12, 2018. Picture taken April 12, 2018. (Reuters)



# Fitch unit sees downside to warmer PH-China ties

Pivot toward Beijing ... poses downside risks to growth sustainability

**R**ENEWED relations between the Philippines and China — a result of President Rodrigo Duterte's pivot to Beijing at the expense of Washington — will likely grow warmer but comes with some disadvantages, a Fitch Group unit said.

Following Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit earlier this week, Fitch Solutions issued two reports: one warning that strengthened ties could pose a threat to economic growth and the other tagging the third telco search result as a sign of Beijing's growing political clout.

"We at Fitch Solutions expect bilateral ties and economic cooperation between China and the Philippines to deepen further over the coming years," the Fitch

unit said in a political risk analysis.

The outlook is based on Beijing's support for the Duterte administration's ambitious "Build Build Build" infrastructure program and expectations that the Chinese government's shift towards a consumption-driven economy would open opportunities for increased Philippine exports.

Fitch Solutions warned, however, that China was struggling to sustain its eco-

conomic growth momentum amid rising trade tensions with the US and that the Philippines' own "pivot toward Beijing at the expense of relationship with the West poses downside risks to growth sustainability in the event that Chinese financing dries up."

Increased tensions between China and the US are also likely to "damage economic cooperation and could see China pull out of infrastructure investments in the Philippines," it added.

Duterte's active courting of Beijing — he has set aside a 2016 Hague tribunal ruling that rejected China's claims to the South China Sea — could lead to a "backlash as his administration is seen as bending over backwards for China, and this could have negative implications

for his allies at the upcoming May 2019 mid-term elections."

"Furthermore, there is little to show for the Philippines' conciliatory approach as out of 36 Philippine projects earmarked for Chinese involvement two years ago, only four were among the commitments made on November 20 [as Xi began his state visit]," it also said.

During the November 20-21 visit, China and Philippines inked 29 deals ranging from cooperation in education, culture and industrial park development, to jointly promoting infrastructure, agriculture cooperatives and establishing sanitation protocols for shipping coconuts.

Fitch Solutions also noted that a protest against closer ties with Beijing had

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➤ Downside B2

## ■ DOWNSIDE FROM B1

# Fitch

been held at the Chinese Embassy and that a Social Weather Stations survey showed that 84 percent of Filipinos objected to the Duterte government's inaction on Chinese expansion in the South China Sea.

## Third telco

In the second report, the Fitch unit said that the selection of Mindanao Islamic Telephone Co., Inc. (Mislatel) — led by Filipino firms Udenna Corp. and Chelsea Logistics Corp. plus state-owned China Telecommunications Corp. — as the country's third major telco was another indication of renewed China-Philippines ties.

"The selection of China Telecom,

which follows the almost immediate disqualification of the two other bidders, hints at the government's bias towards Chinese involvement in the telecoms sector, and is a clear sign of Duterte's warming posture towards China," Fitch Solutions said.

It noted that a number of Filipinos had voiced concern over a possible "threat to national security" but added that the choice of China Telecom was the "most feasible one" from a technical perspective as the state-owned firm's experience, scale and financial flexibility made it the only player capable of making "any credible attempt at threatening the existing [PLDT-Globe] duopoly."

Still, it said that Mislatel faced an "uphill task in a market that has maneuvered for years to keep new entrants out and has continuously undermined the supervisory power of the telecoms regulator."

"To succeed, the new entrant will need to have continued regulatory support from the government to operate," Fitch Solutions added.

"The Mislatel consortium enters the Philippines telecoms sector with few existing assets excluding Mindanao Telecom's limited local access network infrastructure. It will likely rely on roaming arrangements of the two incumbent carriers in the near-term to provide services while it focuses on its own rollout."

It recalled that a year ago, Duterte had singled out China Telecom as likely challenger to PLDT and Globe and that businessman Dennis Uy, who controls Udenna and Chelsea Logistics, is a key supporter of the president and had donated to his 2016 campaign.

Mislatel's entry will change competitive dynamics in the domestic telecommunications sector, Fitch Solutions said, pointing out that it

would have to offer very competitive rates to grab market share.

Meanwhile, the possibility of China Telecom's connecting its Hong Kong-Americas subsea cable to the Philippines — to be studied under a deal signed with the government during Xi's visit — "is set to increase international bandwidth and lower access costs for the telco as well as the other incumbent operators, supporting data growth across the country."

Fitch Solutions also noted that a 40-percent ownership cap for foreign players had likely dissuaded firms such as Korea's KT, Britain's Vodafone and Norway's Telenor from pursuing an initial interest, and that legal challenges by disqualified bidders would unlikely halt Mislatel from proceeding with its roll-out.

**FROM REPORTS BY  
MAYVELIN U. CARABALLO  
AND LISBET K. ESMAEL**



## PROC unveils 'Xiplomacy'

A new People's Republic of China (PROC) tack, which is defined as Xiplomacy referring to the charm offensive of President Xi Jinping in the region, was put into high gear in his recent three-nation Asia-Pacific tour that included the Philippines.

Xi during his Asian tour put forward proposals on tackling global challenges and promoting cooperation to invigorate regional development. *Turn to page 6*

The Chinese leader paid state visits to Papua New Guinea (PNG), Brunei and the Philippines and attended the 28th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting.

State news agency Xinhua said the "strong messages China sent out during the week-long trip, particularly its commitment to opening-up and international collaboration, matter greatly in today's world."

### Upgrading of relations

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Xi's visits to Brunei and the Philippines provided important opportunities for developing bilateral ties with them. The visits both featured raising diplomatic ties to a higher level of relationship to a strategic cooperative partnership with Brunei and a comprehensive strategic cooperation with the Philippines.

Wang said that it was stressed that China, with each of the two countries, shares extensive interests in the South China Sea, adding that the two countries agreed to resolve differences with China through friendly consultations, further maritime cooperation and push talks on a code of conduct in the South China Sea.

The two members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also agreed to work together with China towards greater progress in China-ASEAN cooperation.

### Strong messages China sent out during Xi's week-long trip matter greatly in today's world.

Wang said Xi discussed with leaders of the two countries overall plans for aligning the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with their development strategies and deepening win-win cooperation, as he witnessed the signing of related agreements.

### Friendship dominates

Xi also reached consensus with leaders of the two countries on closer people-to-people exchanges and agreed to expand cooperation in sectors such as education, culture, sports, public health and tourism.

Wang said the fruitful results of Xi's visits to the two countries showed again that friendship and cooperation dominate the relations between China and its neighbors while serving the interests of regional countries and their peoples.

Friendship, common development and proper management of differences will help make the South China Sea a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation, contributing to regional stability, growth and prosperity.

### Open engagement

Xi concluded a seven-day Asia-Pacific trip which he extensively used to reaffirm China's commitment to an open and inclusive cooperation and common development, as well as friendly relations in the region.

From 15 to 21 November, Xi attended the 28th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting, paid state visits to PNG, Brunei and the Philippines and met with leaders of the Pacific island countries that have diplomatic ties with China during the APEC event.

At the APEC meeting, Xi offered China's wisdom and approaches to achieving economic development and cooperation in the region and the world at large, amid increasing economic instability and uncertainty and other global challenges, Wang said.

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# NUPL: Probe soldiers' link to lawyer's slay

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr. @nestorburgosjr

**BACLOD CITY**—Colleagues of slain human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos Jr. will ask law enforcement agencies to investigate two military men for possible involvement in the killing. Badre Orlaia, president of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL), said they were gathering evidence to support possible legal actions against the two men, identified as Cpl. Rodolfo Aleman Jr. and Makoy Villahermosa.

"It is possible that the two or their proxies, like paid assassins or militiamen, could be involved in the killing of (Ramos) and other cases of harassment," Orlaia told the Inquirer.

Ramos a NUPL founding member and secretary general of its Negros chapter, was shot dead on Nov. 6 in front of a convenience store in Bacoled City, Negros Occidental province.

In an earlier interview, Clarissa Ramos, widow of Ramos, said she also wanted the two men to be investigated after they were detained by the police in Sipalay City.

Aleman and Villahermosa were detained after NUPL lawyers and activists sought police assistance on Saturday when one of the motorcycle-riding men allegedly brandished a handgun as they passed the Sipalay City gymnasium where the wake for Ramos was being held.

The two men were also seen



TRIBUTE Farmers, activists and lawyers call for justice as they pay tribute to slain human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos Jr. during his funeral in Sipalay City.—NESTOR P. BURGOS JR.

falling a convoy of NUPL lawyers and human rights activists from Bacoled City to Karapatan.

"If something bad happened to them, they would again blame the government. That's why the two were there," he said.

Arevalo also dismissed allegations linking them to the killing of Ramos.

"They had mission orders and they were not harassing them. These leftists have a propensity to spread lies," he said.

Arevalo said the two men were tasked to "monitor and provide security" to the convoy, which included Orlaia and other NUPL members and officials.

### Mission orders

But Col. Benedict Arevalo, commander of the Army's 303rd Brigade, dismissed the allegations.

### Grave threats

Judge Weme Espinosa of the Municipal Trial Court in Sipalay City ordered the release of Aleman and Villahermosa on Monday after their lawyer posted bail of P3,000 each for grave threats.

NUPL lawyers filed an attempted murder complaint against the two men but the Sipalay City prosecutor's office downgraded the case to grave threats, citing lack of clear indication to warrant an attempted murder complaint.

Orlaia said they were questioning why only one firearm was recovered from the two men when witnesses had seen them armed with a handgun each.

He also said one of the men, who identified himself as Villahermosa, did not have an identification card and could have given a false name. INQ

### **Militant gunrunner slain in Ormoc**

TACLOBAN CITY - A suspected member of the Dawlah Islamiyah terrorist group tagged in gunrunning was killed in an entrapment in Sitio Lawis, Barangay Airport in Ormoc yesterday.

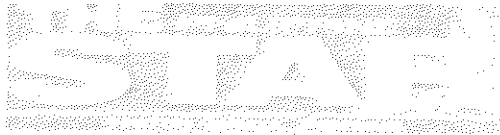
Joseph Anulga Jr., alias Dawud, reportedly drew his gun when he sensed he had sold a caliber .45 pistol for P12,000 to undercover agents.

The operation was carried out by personnel of the 802nd Infantry Brigade, 8th Infantry Division and the police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group.

Authorities said Anulga was reportedly recruiting local residents to convert to Islam.

The fatality was an alleged associate of the late Yusuf Macuto, who was involved in the foiled plot to bomb the US embassy in November 2016 and the bomb attack in Hilognos also in Leyte in December 2016.

Police said Anulga's group also plotted bomb attacks in Leyte. - Miriam Desacada, Emmanuel Tupas, Jaime Laude



# Lawmaker safe, pilot injured in helicopter crash

A party-list congressman was declared safe while a pilot suffered head injuries when a military helicopter crash-landed in Crow Valley in Tarlac yesterday.

A report quoting former

House secretary-general Cesar Pareja said he was with Coop-Natcco party-list Rep. Antonio Bravo and several staff of the House of Representatives when the accident occurred.

Pareja said the pilot suffered head injuries while the crew has a broken arm.

"We are safe... I have minor scratches along with most passengers," he said.

The report did not say

why Bravo's group was visiting Crow Valley where Philippine and American military forces usually conduct live fire exercises. — De-  
lon Porcalla, Jess Diaz, Ding Cervantes, Jaime Laude 17

## Party-list solon, team survive helicopter crash

By Maricel V. Cruz

A PARTY-LIST lawmaker and his group were slightly injured after the military chopper they boarded crashed Thursday in Crow Valley in Capas, Tarlac during a military event.

COOP-NATCCO party-list Rep. Anthony Bravo sustained bruises, according to his chief of staff Rene Buenviaje, who confirmed the news based on the information he got from a staff who accompanied the congressman.

But he could not say if Bravo sustained fractures, but expressed belief the lawmaker was not in a critical condition.

In the past, the Philippine Air Force denounced the branding of their fleets as "widowmakers" and "flying coffins."

Former House Secretary General Cesar Pareja, another passenger in the chopper, thanked those who had prayed

for their safety.

"Thanks for your prayers. The pilot suffered head injuries and the crew had a broken arm. I have minor scratches along with most of the passengers. The helicopter crashed just as we were about to land in Crow Valley," Pareja told reporters.

Informed sources said the other chopper passengers included Baltazar Reyes, Col. Arthur Baybayan, the Sergeant-at-Arms at the Commission on Appointments, Daisy de Lima, Romeo V. Almonte, 1st Lt. Melvin Betia, and Edilberto M. Mandap.

The team was invited by the Armed Forces of the Philippines for the Training and Doctrine Command when the accident happened.

Reports said that Senator Ralph Recto, a reservist, who attended the event to witness the live fire drill, saw the chopper crash.

## Solon, 11 others survive chopper crash

By **Hananeel Bordey**

A helicopter carrying COOP NATCCO Party-list Rep. Anthony Bravo, former House of Representatives Secretary General Cesar Pareja and 10 others crashed in a ravine in Tarlac.

Sergeant-at-arms of the Commission on Appointment, Colonel Arthur Baybayan, was quoted in a radio report as saying there were no casualties in the incident but the lawmaker suffered some bruises and one of the crewmen broke his arm.

**The helicopter crashed just as we were about to land in Crow Valley.**

Baybayan said the chopper was one of the two helicopters carrying participants in the Armed Forces of the Philippines Legislative Stakeholders Engagement from Tridoc in Capas, Tarlac going to

Crow Valley Gunnery Range.

Bene Buendia, the chief-of-staff of Bravo, also confirmed the lawmaker was among passengers in the chopper that crashed.

According to Pareja, the chopper crashed just before they landed in Crow Valley.

"Thanks for your prayers. The pilot suffered head injuries and one of the crew has a broken arm. I have minor scratches along with most of the passengers. The helicopter crashed just as we were about to land in Crow Valley" Pareja said. 3

Philippine Air Force spokesman Maj. Aris Galang said the Sokol chopper with 12 people on board (4 pilot and crew, 8 passengers) crash-landed in Durgawan in Capas, Tarlac around 2 p.m. Thursday but there were no casualties or anyone in critical condition.

All the injured were brought to the nearest hospital for appropriate treatment.



# INQUIRER

### Army soldier guns down Bulacan teacher, then kills self

BOCAUE, BULACAN—An Army soldier on Wednesday shot dead an elementary schoolteacher and wounded one of her pupils inside a classroom here before turning the gun on himself, police said. Rupert Datwin, 40, who was armed with a pistol, broke into a classroom at Tambunong Elementary School, approached Melody Esber, 33, and then shot her in the chest. A stray bullet hit the left shoulder of a 9-year-old pupil. Police said the attack might be due to an affair between Datwin and Esber. Police recovered a folder from the crime scene that contained written accounts about their supposed relationship. —CARMELA REYES-ESTROPE

A18

# DEPED reviles teacher's slay, wounding of pupil

**T**HE Department of Education said it "does not condone such display of violence in schools"—referring to the shooting incident that killed an elementary teacher and wounded a pupil in Bulacan.

In a statement Wednesday, DepEd assured the public that it was consistently working with law enforcement agencies and strengthening necessary measures to ensure that schools continue to be a safe environment for its personnel and learners.

Reports said 40-year-old Ruperto Datwin, a member of the Philippine Army, shot to death his live-in-partner Melody Esber, 33, a teacher at the Tambubong Elementary School.

Datwin killed himself after shooting Esber's chest with a handgun in front of her pupils, where nine-year-old Raine Julian was wounded on his shoulder during the incident.

DepEd extended its deep-

est condolences to the bereaved family of Esber and Datwin. It also confirmed that Julian was wounded and was now in stable condition.

The rest of Esber's students who witnessed the crime were now undergoing psychological debriefing facilitated by the Schools Division Office of Bulacan's medical team.

"The SDO of Bulacan, in close coordination with the Philippine National Police-Bulacan, is conducting an investigation on the motive of the suspect. Officials of Tambubong Elementary School have already

reached out to the victim's family to identify and provide the necessary assistance," the department said. PNA

## House panel starts discussion on bill granting authority to solemnize marriage

By CHARISSA M. LIM-ATIENZA

**C**iting the increasing number of common law relationships or "live-ins" in the country, the House Committee on Revision of Laws has jump-started its deliberation on a measure granting members of the House of Representatives and provincial governors the authority to solemnize marriage.

The panel tacked House Bill 6699, authored by Pangasinan Rep. Marilyn Primicias-Agabas.

"We know for a fact that mayors have the authority to solemnize marriage, the incumbent members of the judiciary within their jurisdiction and any priest or rabbi are also authorized to solemnize marriage," Primicias-Agabas said.

She noted those who are allowed to solemnize marriage

are ship captain or airplane chief in certain instances, as well as military commanders in some instances, and the consul general or vice consul.

Primicias-Agabas noted the growing number of common law relationships or "live-ins" in the country.

"There are also a number of instances of common law relationships, even when the couple does not have any impediment to contract marriage," she said.

Primicias-Agabas said among the reasons that make it difficult for the parties to contract marriage are financial challenges, monetary difficulty, remoteness of the place of the couple or the difference in the religious beliefs.

"The proposal to add House members and provincial governors to the list of persons authorized to solemnize marriage will give couples more options to choose their solemnizing officer and it is hoped to encourage couples to legalize their unions," she said.

After Leyte Rep. Jose Carlos Cari asked how the member should go about the prerequisites of marriage, Primicias-Agabas explained that her bill is just limited in giving authority to House Members to solemnize marriage and that marrying couples have to comply with the requirements for marriage.

She said her bill excludes party-list representatives.

"I have this opinion personally that if you are a district representative, you have a regular district, you have your own area of jurisdiction," Primicias-Agabas said, citing that it is more possible for district representatives to know the people in their districts unlike the party-list whose area of jurisdiction is nationwide and it would be hard for them to determine or know their people.

# AFP Central Command has new chief

BY CALVIN CORDOVA

CEBU CITY—The Armed Forces of the Philippines' Central Command (Centcom) has a new chief.

Major General Noel Clemente assumed the post during the change of command ceremony Thursday at Camp Lapu-Lapu in Barangay Apas.

Clemente said he "is humbled to replace" Lt. General Paul Atal, who was Centcom chief for 10 months. Atal will be reassigned to AFP's General Headquarters in Quezon City.

AFP Chief of Staff Carlito Galvez Jr. attended the ceremony.

Atal thanked the national and local government units as well as other sectors in helping his leadership

implement the AFP's Transformation Roadmap, which is a 15-year strategy to transform the military into a strong and credible institution built on good governance.

Atal asked Centcom personnel to support Clemente and also encouraged the community to rally behind the new Centcom chief to achieve peace in the region.

Clemente, on the other hand, said ensuring a peaceful election next year will be one of his main goals.

"That's a very big issue for next year. We have to make sure that our people can elect the right people without anybody threatening them," he said.

Clemente said one of the orders given to him by the AFP Chief of Staff is

to come up with an effective campaign against insurgency.

"The order was to make sure that we will be able to lessen the capabilities of the enemies. Harness our available forces and work together with local government units because we cannot do our job without the help of our counterparts," said Clemente.

Clemente assured that Centcom will be ready to provide assistance in the campaign against illegal drugs. <sup>20</sup>

"The police have our full support. The role of the military in the campaign against illegal drugs is to help in intelligence gathering to identify possible targets and also if needed, assist in apprehensions especially if the targets have the firepower," said Clemente.

**\* Compostela governor  
bats for ML extension**

DAVAO CITY -- Compostela Valley Governor Jayvee Iryon Uy is urging the government to extend martial law in Mindanao claiming that his province greatly benefited from it. Uy said his province was able to reduce its crime rate, encourage the surrender of many rebels, and create a climate conducive for business and investments. Under martial law, his province was recognized by the Department of Trade and Industry as the second most competitive province in the Davao Region. Uy said there is a need to sustain their gains and keep peace. He said the province will continue to collaborate with different sectors to achieve enduring peace and sustainable development for all. (Armando B. Fencuito Jr.) 23

## Gov't to construct housing units for CAFGUs

By NIRE U. CRISMUNDO

**BUTUAN CITY** - A housing project intended for the 60 members of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGUs) of the Ligadan Organic Farmers Association (LOFA) started last week after a groundbreaking ceremony took place in Barangay Mayo, Mati City, Davao Oriental province. Maj. Harold A. Ho, Civil Military Operation (CMO) officer of the 72nd Infantry (Gabay) said.

Both the provincial government of Davao Oriental and the city government of Mati will provide the construction materials for the 60 houses with the land purchased by the LOFA.

In a statement sent to The Manila Bulletin on Wednesday, the 72nd CMO officer said the housing project intended for the CAFGUs materialized after provincial officials led by Davao Oriental Gov. Nelson L. Dayanghirang officially did the groundbreaking for the 1.2 hectare residential site located in Barangay Mayo last Thursday (Nov. 15).

# Duterte fires housing exec

BY RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

**P**RESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has fired the No. 2 official of the government's top housing body for alleged corruption.

In a statement, Malacañang spokesman Salvador Panelo said the axing of Falconi Millar, secretary general of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC), was in sync with the administration's anti-corruption drive.

► Fires A2

2/10

## Duterte fires

"There are no sacred cows in the administration, especially in its drive against corruption. As the President said, he will not tolerate even a whiff of corruption in the executive branch of government," he said.

Panelo did not go into details on Millar's supposed misdeeds.

Millar, a lawyer and certified public accountant who worked under HUDCC Chairman Eduardo del Rosario, denied being involved in corruption.

He said he resigned on Thursday morning and was not fired.

"It is an obvious demolition job. In protecting the interest of the government, I have annoyed some personalities," Millar said in a text message sent to reporters.

### 'Power corrupted him'

The sacking was confirmed by President Duterte himself, in remarks during the inauguration of the Cavite Gateway Terminal in Tanza, Cavite.

Duterte said that before the event, he signed the dismissal of Millar after reviewing the housing official's resume.

He added that power corrupted Millar, who was in the position to make money out of government deals.

"I don't know somehow along the way corruption seeps in and it's hard. When you are there, sec-gen (secretary general), you have the power, authority. Power corrupts and sometimes you want your money to go to your pocket almost every day," Duterte said.

Duterte noted corruption in the government, saying he was having a hard time dealing with it.

But he called on the people to "disabuse" their minds of corruption in the executive branch of the government.

"We don't have that here," the Chief Executive said.

## Marawi task force

Millar was the head of the secretariat of Task Force "Bangon Marawi," which was formed for the rehabilitation of war-ravaged Marawi City.

The sacking came a few weeks after the groundbreaking for the redevelopment of Marawi's "ground zero."

The groundbreaking had been delayed multiple times.

Panelo had said Duterte was "exasperated" by the delays.

On Thursday, he announced that the delivery of the public services provided by HUDCC would "unimpededly continue," especially the rehabilitation of Marawi City.

Duterte has said repeatedly that he would not hesitate to fire government officials linked to corruption.

He has sacked a number of government officials since June 2016 because of excessive foreign trips, as well as alleged corruption.

The list includes former Department of Interior and Local Government chief Ismael Sueno, National Immigration Administration chief Peter Lavina, Social Security System commissioner Jose Gabriel "Pompee" Lavina, Maritime Industry Authority Administrator Marcial Quirico Amaro 3rd and Commission on Higher Education chief Patricia Licuanan.

Labor Undersecretary Dominador Say and Tourism chief Wanda Tulfo Teo resigned amid corruption allegations.

In August, Malacañang announced Duterte's firing of Brig. Gen. Edwin Torrelavega, the chief of V. Luna Hospital and Col. Antonio Punzalan, the head of the logistics office of the military hospital, for allegedly undertaking anomalous purchases of equipment and engaging in fraudulent transactions worth P1,491,570.

Duterte dismissed at the same time the comptroller of the Philippine Military Academy, Hector Marana, for alleged malversation of P15 million worth of allowances of cadets.



## Ex-Sulu gov says 2016 ARMM polls rigged

FORMER Sulu governor Abdusakur Tan has revealed alleged rigging in the 2016 elections in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and challenged the Commission on Elections (Comelec) on the poll results there.

Tan claimed that 80 percent of the total number of votes in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur and Basilan were forged and cast by "flying voters" from other provinces.

He said that based on Comelec forensic examination, the thumbprints of the registered voters were different from those of actual voters in the three ARMM provinces.

"It is unfair for the citizens of ARMM to be led by a fake governor," Tan said.

He ran against now ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman in the 2016 elections

►RiggedA8

■ RIGGED FROM A1

## Ex-Sulu governor says 2016 ARMM polls rigged

but lost, prompting him to file a protest before the Comelec, citing fraud.

Sixto Brillantes, former Comelec chairman and Tan's lawyer, said those who voted in the elections were not registered voters but "substitute voters" who are rampant in Mindanao.

Brillantes said 40,000 of the 67,000 examined thumbprints should be declared null and void for being bogus.

Tan also revealed alleged plans of massive cheating by the Aquino administration and moves to stop

him from running against Hataman through the intervention of then-Interior Secretary Jesse Robredo.

He recalled that during a later meeting with another Interior secretary — Manuel Roxas 2nd — officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police and the Department of National Defense, then-President Benigno Aquino 3rd allegedly threatened that he would personally visit Sulu and destroy Tan if he did not withdraw his candidacy. **JOMAR CANLAS**



### Campus security protocols

Following the murder-suicide incident at an elementary school in Bulacan, I-Ang Edukasyon Rep. Salvador Belaro Jr. urged the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education to issue an order directing intensive security measures and protocols in schools and campuses. "Noting that the assailant in this incident was a soldier, I therefore, ask DND (Department of National Defense) and AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines), as well as DILG (Department of Interior and Local Government) and PNP (Philippine National Police), to formulate and enter into a joint agreement with the DepEd a set of guidelines on the conduct of soldiers and police officers upon entering any school campus." Belaro asked.

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# DND chief to fight NDFP bid to resume talks

By Jeannette I. Andrade  
@jiandradeINQ

The police and military will oppose further attempts by the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) to restore peace talks with the government.

In a statement on Thursday, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said that Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Maria Sison's claim that threats had been made against NDFP negotiators Fidel Agcaoili, Luis Jalandoni and Coni Ledesma by President Duterte's "armed minions," which resulted in the cancellation of their trip to the Philippines, was insulting.

## No respect

"Mr. Sison is trying his damndest best to have his subalterns meet with the President and yet, at the same time, throws an insulting remark," Lorenzana said.

"This shows his lack of respect

for the President," he added.

Lorenzana said that Sison insulted not only the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police when he called them the President's armed minions, but also Mr. Duterte.

The defense secretary explained, "Minion is a term of contempt. It means a servile, fawning and an unimportant person who is at the beck and call of a powerful person."

## Typical of Sison

"This is a great insult to our police and military officers and personnel who are doing their jobs with utmost dedication and professionalism in serving the Filipino people," Lorenzana said.

"Mr. Sison's insult will only make the police and military dig in and oppose any overtures of peace talks from the National Democratic Front," Lorenzana added.

He said that it was typical of

the CPP founding chair to blame the government for rebel leaders' decision to call off their own plan to return to the country.

"It is not the government's loss if Mr. Jalandoni and Ms. Ledesma return or not to the Philippines," Lorenzana said in Filipino.

He said it was not the government, which was "desperate" to resume peace talks or losing a large number of fighters.

## Program highlights

He cited the success of the government's Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) in luring communist rebels to turn themselves in.

As a result of E-CLIP, Lorenzana said, CPP and New People's Army, CPP's armed wing, had been losing fighters. *K22*

E-CLIP offers cash and housing to rebels in exchange for their firearms and oath of allegiance to the government. *INQ*

# Army to intensify crackdown on NPAs

ORAS, Eastern Samar - An Army battalion here has vowed to push hard against communist rebels in Samar.

Lt. Col. Jimmy Jimenez, commanding officer of the 14th Infantry Battalion, said the objective of the intensified offensive against the rebels is "to degrade their armed components and to further eradicate" their numbers by 2019.

Last Tuesday, troops from the 14th IB recovered two improvised explosive

devices, a rifle grenade, and spent rifle magazines after an encounter with a group of about 10 rebels in Barangay Concepcion, Paranas, Eastern Samar.

The firefight lasted for 10 minutes.

There were no casualties on the soldiers' side, while casualties on the rebels' side were still being confirmed," Jimenez said. (Marie Tonette Grace Marticio) 20

# Decrease in crime rate in Mindanao must continue – Go

Former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go assured some 3,000 local leaders in Lanao del Norte that he would help them fight criminality, corruption, and illegal drugs to continue the decreasing crime rate in the province and the whole of Mindanao.

Go issued the statement at a convention organized by Governor Imelda Dimaporo at the Mindanao Civic Center Gymnasium in Tubod, Lanao del Norte on Wednesday and which also coincided with the birthday of Congressman Bobby Dimaporo.

The Police Regional Office in Northern Mindanao issued a report that crime in the region significantly decreased during the first half of 2018 with the total crime occurrences in the area decreasing by 40.27 percent as compared to the same period last year.

Go, a candidate for senator in the 2019 elections, is also pushing to institutionalize a system that will empower local government units to engage in localized peace talks to settle conflicts in their respective areas.

Localized peace talks are patterned after a set of programs and projects implemented in Davao region. Citing their experience in Davao, Go said that efforts of

the local government resulted in a lower incidence of clashes between soldiers and communist rebels, a higher number of rebels surrendering to the government, and lower crime rates in the area.

"President Duterte wanted the Davao model to be replicated in other areas of the Philippines," Go said.

Go vowed that he would push for programs that could help local government units maintain peace and order. He also said there should be a sports and development center in every LGU where trainings and mentorships could be given to the youth. "It will help them achieve their full potentials and avoid drugs and other vices," Go said.

He also said that he would review and possibly move to amend the Juvenile Justice Law because some drug syndicates and criminals are using the law to take advantage of minors and use them in illegal activities.

"I plan to continue establishing more Malasakit Centers all over the Philippines. It is a one-stop shop where affordable and quality healthcare services will be accessible to everyone especially those in need," Go said adding that the government plans to establish a Malasakit Center in Lanao del Norte



Former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go

in the coming months. 23

Go has been instrumental in pushing for the Malasakit Centers to make quality healthcare more accessible to Filipinos. There are currently 17 cities with existing Centers: Cebu, Tacloban, Iloilo, Bacolod, Puerto Princesa, Philippine General Hospital (PGH) in Manila, Maasin, Dumaguete, Davao, Pampanga, Tagbilaran, Butuan, Cagayan de Oro, Zamboanga, Legazpi, and most recently launched, in Isulan and Cotabato City.

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# Bong Go pushes localized peace talks



Former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go takes a groupie with members of the Association of Registrars and Deputy Registrars of Deeds, Inc. that held its national convention in Quezon City. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Registry of Deeds is under Land Registration Authority, and its main function is to serve as the public repository of all records, including certificates of land titles.

Localized peace talks are seen as alternative to the peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines which was terminated by Duterte in November last year.

Go said the local peace efforts of the Davao government reduced clashes between soldiers and communist rebels. More rebels also surrendered to the government.

"President Duterte wanted the Davao model to be replicated in other areas of the Philippines," he added.

Go emphasized the importance of land titles, citing as example President Duterte's distribution of some 3.1 hectares of land to the Ati tribe in Boracay Island.

"No one can take their land away from them again," he said.

FORMER special assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go told registrars of deeds that he would push for localized peace talks to help settle land disputes especially in conflict areas.

"Some conflicts in our society involve land titles. Localized peace talks may help resolve the issues and stop the dispute between parties since local executives are more familiar with the issues of their respective communities," Go said.

He issued the statement at the national convention of the Association of Registrars and Deputy Registrars of Deeds Inc. on November 20 in Seda Hotel in Quezon City.

The group has more than 170 members nationwide, 95 percent of whom are lawyers. Each city and province has its own registrar of deeds.

Go said as "keepers of land," it was crucial for registrars to be truthful in their jobs especially given President Rodrigo Duterte's zero tolerance for corruption policy.

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# Go ranks top 8 in nationwide senatorial survey

Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go yesterday placed 8th in a comprehensive nationwide survey conducted by DZRH, the flagship station of the Manila Broadcasting Company (MBC), for the upcoming 2019 senatorial race.

The survey data, according to the company, were gathered through face-to-face interviews conducted on 17 November, Saturday with 7,450 respondents - a sample that is statistically representative of voters in Metro Manila and 73 provinces nationwide with an error margin of +/- 1.14 percent.

Go's strong showing in the survey came just a little over a month after he filed his candidacy and barely a year after his name was first mentioned by his mentor, President Rodrigo Duterte, as a possible candidate for the Senate. He now emerges as one of the fastest rising senatorial candidates in the country.

He is running on a platform based on "Malasakit" that aims to make government services more accessible to all Filipinos.

**He is running on a platform based on "Malasakit" that aims to make government services more accessible to all Filipinos.**

"It should not be difficult for our people to avail themselves of assistance from the government. This is what I would fight for: easier access to government services. I will act as your bridge to the President," Go had said in past interviews.

Go's full legislative agenda covers a wide range of the issues that the current administration is trying to address to uplift the quality of life of every Filipino.

Among other things Go is advocating free school supplies to poor students and increasing

teachers' pay for education, holding localized peace talks to remedy armed disputes as well as the creation of a department for Overseas Filipino workers.

Go also vowed to support the legislative agenda of the President for genuine change if he is elected senator.

"We have to continue what our President has begun," he stressed.

Go was instrumental in pushing for the establishment of Malasakit Centers to make quality healthcare more accessible to Filipinos.

There are currently 17 cities with existing Centers: Cebu, Tacloban, Iloilo, Bacolod, Puerto Princesa, Philippine General Hospital in Manila, Maasin, Dumaguete, Davao, Pampanga, Tagbilaran, Butuan, Cagayan de Oro, Zamboanga, Legazpi and most recently launched, in Isulan and Cotabato city.

Malasakit Centers are designed as a one-stop shop program of President Duterte to hasten the delivery of medical services and give poor patients access to free medicine, featuring a fast lane to prioritize senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

For his efforts, Go earned the support of various groups, including the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, the League of Municipalities of the Philippines, Philippine Councilors League and other local government officials all over the country.

Go sees his years of experience working under former Mayor and now President Duterte as his strength in understanding and addressing the real problems of ordinary Filipinos.

"I have been in the Executive Department for the past 20 years so I have a first-hand understanding of how our laws are being implemented. If I'm elected as senator, I would

review many laws to improve them and ensure they would truly benefit our people," he said.

Other candidates who share the top-eight spot include Sen. Cynthia Villar, who emerged as the early leader with 61.8 percent, followed by Lito Lapid with 50.3 percent. Clustered together in the third to sixth spots are Sen. Grace Poe-Llamanzares, Taguig City Rep. Pia Cayetano, Sen. Nancy Binay and former Sen. Ramon "Bong" Revilla, Jr.

Vying for the seventh to eleventh spots are former Sen.

Jinggoy

Estrada, Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III, former Sen. Sergio "Serge" Osmeña III and retired Philippine National Police Chief Ronald "Bato" de la Rosa.

Meanwhile, Go earlier had vowed to help local officials fight the menace of criminality, corruption and illegal drugs.

Go made the statement in his message as guest of honor at a convention of some 8,000 local officials in Tubod, Lanao del Norte, organized by Gov. Imelda Dimaporo.

Earlier, the Police Regional Office in Northern Mindanao had reported the crime in the region dropped significantly in the first half of 2018, decreasing by 40.27 percent compared to the same period last year. **CRP**

## Cancellation of NDF visit their loss, not ours—DND

IT'S their loss, not ours.

National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said that the cancellation of the trip of National Democratic Front chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili and consultants Luis Jalandoni and Coni Ledesma to the country is not a loss for the government since it is NDF which is desperate to resume the aborted peace talks.

*"Hindi lamulan sa gobyerno kung inilagay man o hindi nina Mr. Jalandoni at Ms. Ledesma ang paghalik sa Pilinas,"* Lorenzana said in a statement. "After all, it is not the government that is desperate to resume peace talks with the NDF [National Democratic Front]."

"It is also not to government that is losing a large number of fighters because of the effectiveness of the localized peace talks and the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program [E-CLIP]," he added.

Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria Sison earlier said that the NDF top officials canceled their trip to the country for 'security reasons,' while also calling the military and police as President Rodrigo Duterte's 'minions.' **A3**

Lorenzana said Sison's statement was an insult not only to the military and police but to President Duterte himself.

"Minion is a term of contempt. It means a servile, fawning, and an unimportant person who is at the beck and call of a powerful person," Lorenzana said.

"This is a great insult to our police and military officers and personnel who are doing their jobs with utmost dedication and professionalism in serving the Filipino people," he added. PNA



# Lorenzana berates Joma Sison for insulting PRRD

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana yesterday berated Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria Sison for insulting President Duterte following the cancellation of the visit to Manila of National Democratic Front of the Philippines leaders Luis Jaladoni and Coni Ledesma.

"In his recent statement, Mr. Joma Sison said that "threats have been made by the armed minions of Duterte against Luis Jaladoni and Coni Ledesma. They have therefore decided not to go to Manila," Lorenzana said.

"Mr. Sison is trying his damndest best to have his subalterns meet with the President and yet, at the same time, throws an insulting remark. This shows his lack of respect for the President," he added.

Lorenzana said Sison insulted not only Duterte, but also the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police when he called them the President's "minions."



LORENZANA

He said minion is a term of contempt. It means a servile, fawning, and an unimportant person who is at the beck and call of a powerful person.

"This is a great insult to our police and military officers and personnel who are doing their jobs with utmost dedication and professionalism in serving the Filipino people," Lorenzana said.

"Mr. Sison's insult will only make the police and military dig in and oppose any overtures of peace talks from the National Democratic Front. It is so typical of Mr. Sison to always put the blame on the government for a decision only they themselves made."

"Hindi kawaian sa gobyerno kung ituloy man o hindi nina Mr. Jaladoni at Ms. Ledesma ang pagbalik sa Pilipinas," Lorenzana added.

The Defense Secretary maintained that the government is not desperate to resume peace talks with the NDF. He added that the government is not losing a large number of fighters because of the effectiveness of the localized peace talks and the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program. (Francis T. Wakefield) Z

# Suspected terrorist killed in Ormoc

BY MARIE TONETTE GRACE MARTICIO

TACLOBAN CITY - An alleged member of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was killed in an intelligence operation in Ormoc City Thursday morning.

Initial reports indicated a joint team of militiamen, and troops from the Army 802nd Infantry Brigade conducted an operation against an ISIS-affiliated terrorist cell in Sitio Lawis, Barangay Airport, Ormoc.

Killed in the operation was the cell leader, Joseph "Dawud" Anulga Jr.

Brig. Gen. Lope Dagoy, 802nd IB commander, said Anulga was under

surveillance for more than two months after intelligence confirmed he was the cell leader.

It was learned that Anulga had pledged allegiance to ISIS and its recognized caliph, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi.

He was an Islamic convert and a close associate of the Yusuf Macuto, who was involved in a foiled plot to bomb the US Embassy in November 2016, and was the main suspect in the Hilongos bombing in December of the same year. Macuto was killed during the siege of Marawi City.

Anulga was about to join terrorist groups in Mindanao and was recruiting other Islamic converts.

## IS-linked suspect dies in buy-bust act; vest saves cop

By Francisco Tuyay

A SUSPECTED Islamic State operative who was linked to the foiled bombing of the United States Embassy in Manila in 2016 was killed in a military-police operation in Ormoc City on Thursday.

Army Capt. Salvacion Evangelista, Civil Military Operations head of the 8th Infantry Division, said Joseph Anulga, alias Dawud, was killed after he resisted arrest during a buy-bust operation in Sitio Lawis in Airport village in Ormoc City around 8 am.

He said Anulga was killed after closing a deal with a police poseur for a .45-caliber pistol in exchange for P12,000.

The police anti-narcotics agent was handing the money to Anulga, but Anulga drew his gun and fired at the poseur, hitting his bullet-proof vest and sparking a shootout that led to Anulga's death.

"Anulga was an Islamic Convert who has already pledged allegiance to Daesh and its recognized Caliph Abu Bakr Al Bagdadi," Evangelista said in a report.

*Next page*

## IS-linked...

*From A1*

He was set to go on "Hirrah", join the local terrorist groups at any camp in Mindanao and intended to die as martyr of Islam."

Evangelista said the presence of Anulga in Ormoc City was traced by military and police intelligence operatives based on a tip-off.

He said Anulga was reported recruiting locals in Ormoc to convert to Islam.

He said Anulga was an associate of the late Yusuf Macuto who was involved in a foiled plot to bomb the US Embassy in November 2016, and the main suspect in the Hilongos bombing in December 2016.

Macuto was eventually killed during the battle to liberate Marawi City.

"Anulga's death shows the government's conviction in protecting the people from these lawless elements," said Brigadier General Lope Dagoy, commander of the 802nd Brigade.

"This is a clear message that your AFP and PNP will not tolerate terror groups in our midst." **With Ronald O. Reyes**

## MILF, MNLF unite for BOL ratification

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) is the reason why the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) are working together, former MNLF Chairman Muslimin Sema told thousands of people who attended the Advocacy for the BOL at Datu Sinsuat, Maguindanao on Tuesday.

The activity attended by MNLF members and their communities, was led by the MNLF Central Committee and Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) at Camp Ebrahim Sema. It is the first installment in the upcoming MNLF assemblies for the BOL.

Sema recalled the historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro such as the Jabidah massacre that ultimately led to the establishment of the MNLF in the 1960s. "Ang MNLF ay itinatag dahil sa Jabidah massacre (The MNLF was formed because of the Jabidah massacre)," Sema said.

He also said he was "sentimental" because Camp Ebrahim Sema "was named after my brother who never came home. We never even saw his body," he said. He also acknowledged the hardships the Bangsamoro people went through towards the attainment of their aspirations.

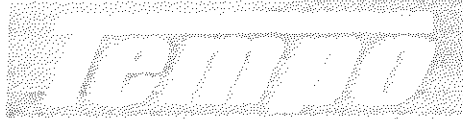
"Sa mga nanay, sa mga byuda kasama na ang mga kalalakihan (To the mothers, widows, and men), we all acknowledge all your contributions. The contributions of your families, your fathers, your mothers, your sisters, your brothers who have shed their tears, sweat, and blood in the Bangsamoro struggle," he said.

"Ang BOL na ito ang maiwan natin sa mga susunod na henerasyon. Sisiguraduhin natin sa pamamagitan ng BOL na hindi na nita mararanasan ang hirap na dinanas natin noon. (We will pass BOL down to the next generations. We will ascertain that through the BOL, they will not go through what we have experienced)," he said.

In a video message played during the event, Deputy Presidential Peace Adviser Nabil A. Tan also emphasized the MNLF's role in supporting the BOL.

"Ang ating Pangulo ay lubos na kinikilala ang critical participation ng ating mga kapatid sa MNLF sa pagpasa ng BOL." (Our President fully recognizes the critical participation of our MNLF brothers and sisters in the passage of the BOL)," he said.

Tan encouraged the participants to continue nurturing the collaboration among all stakeholders.



# ISIS man shot dead in Ormoc

Joint police and military operatives killed a suspected member of a terrorist cell sympathetic to the international terror group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in a shootout in Ormoc City yesterday.

A report reaching Camp Crame in Quezon City identified the slain suspect as Joseph Anulga Jr., alias "Dawud," a resident of Sitio Lawis, Barangay Airport, Ormoc.

Police and military intelligence agents managed to arrange the purchase of a .45 pistol from Anulga for P12,000. The meeting was arranged at 8 a.m. yesterday.

Anulga reportedly noticed that boodle money was given to him and he was dealing with a police poseur-buyer, prompting him to open fire. Backup soldiers and policemen immediately traded shots with Anulga. He died on the spot.

Based on the background check, Anulga was an Islam convert who has been recruiting in Ormoc. Reportedly, he was selling the gun to raise money to join the terror group in Mindanao.

Anulga was a direct associate of the late Yusuf Macuto. Macuto was involved in a foiled plot to bomb the US Embassy last November 2016 and the main suspect in the Hilongos, Leyte bombing last December 2016.

Macuto killed during the Marawi siege. **(Aaron B. Recuenco and Francis T. Wakefield)**

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# Rody sacks Marawi pointman

## *'Please do not make it hard for me'*

Malacañang assured the public rehabilitation efforts in the war-torn city will not be affected despite Millar being booted out of office

By Kristina Maralit  
and Elmer N. Manuel

Saying he is having a hard time combating corruption, President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday ordered Housing and

Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) Secretary-General Falconi Millar, also head of Marawi City reconstruction efforts, dismissed due to allegations of irregularities.

Millar was the secretariat head of Task Force Bangon Marawi.

"Please do not make it really very hard for me to do it," Mr. Duterte asked his co-workers in government during the inauguration of the Cavite Gateway Terminal (CGT) in Tanza, Cavite.

The sacking of Millar, as ordered by Duterte, "takes effect immediately."

Malacañang, meanwhile, assured the public rehabilitation efforts in the war-torn city will not be affected despite Millar being booted out of office.

"For all of you, disabuse your mind about corruption in government at least, here in the Executive Department," Mr. Duterte said.

"Just before I left my office, I signed a dismissal order of the Sec-Gen of Housing, a

certain Millar. I was reading his resumé and I was looking at the termination. What deep sh't the guy has created for him," the President exclaimed.

"It's hard, you know when you are there, Sec-Gen. You have the power. You have the authority. You

Turn to page 2

# Rody sacks Marawi pointman

Disabuse your mind about corruption in gov't in at least, here in the Executive Department

*From page 1*

can do corruption, and it can corrupt you. Give you a little, it corrupts you absolutely. So, power of corruption, and sometimes it is really... You want your money to go to your pocket – almost every day. That's the sad story about this government," he added.

## No details yet

Duterte, however, did not elaborate on the alleged corrupt practices of Millar in the HUDCC or in the rehabilitation efforts of Marawi City.

## What deep sh\*t the guy has created for him.

Millar, however, denied the accusations against him, saying it is nothing but a "demolition job" from "some annoyed personalities." He likewise bared he already submitted his resignation prior to the release

of his termination order.

## Led astray

"He is a valedictorian, but I don't know. Somehow along the way corruption creeps in."

**He is a valedictorian, but I don't know, somehow along the way corruption creeps in.**

In an earlier statement, Malacañang confirmed the sacking of Millar, but did not give any details on the allegations against the HUDCC official who is also the head of the secretariat of the inter-agency Task Force Bangon Marawi which is overseeing the rehabilitation of the war-torn city.

"We assure the public that the delivery of public services shall unimpededly continue, especially in rehabilitating Marawi City and other affected areas," said presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo in a statement, adding, "There are no sacred cows in the administration, especially in its drive against corruption."

The President has been bringing down the axe on high-ranking officials and heads of

offices accused of corruption, excessive travels and abuse of power. This year, Duterte had ordered the dismissal of military officials over supposed anomalous transactions at the V. Luna Medical Center.

## No accolades please

He also fired the board members and the management of Nayong Pilipino Foundation for entering into a supposedly disadvantageous lease deal with a Hong Kong-based developer for an integrated casino resort project.

Duterte said the public should refrain from giving him recognitions or awards, saying public service is his job.

"My services are paid for by the Filipino people. You need not give me undue recognition for doing my duty," Duterte said.

Meanwhile, Millar denied he was fired from his job, explaining he had just filed his resignation prior to the President's speech in the afternoon.

"It is an obvious demolition job. In protecting the interest of the government, I have annoyed some personalities. So, I filed my resignation this morning," Millar said.

to

## EDITORIAL

## Partitioning Palawan

**W**hy cut up Palawan? That question is assuming greater urgency and curiosity as a heretofore obscure bill has wended its way in Congress and appears set to become law. On Monday, the Senate, by a vote of 14-1, passed House Bill No. 8055, which seeks to divvy up Palawan into three smaller provinces: Palawan del Sur, Palawan del Norte and Palawan Oriental.

Palawan's vast swath of land faces the South China Sea, and is considered the Philippines' last ecological frontier for its rich biodiversity. The municipality of Kalayaan, which has jurisdiction over the Philippine-claimed features in the resource-rich Spratly Islands, will be part of Palawan del Sur.

In sponsoring the measure, Sen. Sonny Angara said the country's biggest island province—criss-crossed by 1,800 islands, with an area of some 17,000 square kilometers of land, an economy that grows 7 percent every year and a population of 1.1 million—is ripe for a breakup. It is so vast that "it can fit" five Batangas provinces, the senator said, in perhaps a dead giveaway of the overriding political reason for the proposal.

Stripped of legislative niceties, the measure reeks of gerrymandering, which, in chopping up the province into smaller fiefdoms, will only serve the interests of local proponents intent on diversifying the political playground and affording many more aspirants greater opportunity for public office and power. The proponents claim it will ensure better governance and faster delivery of services to far-flung areas, but the sprawl of the proposed setup is telling. Once the bill is signed into law by President Duterte and the proposal is approved via a referendum in 2020, it will open up seats for three governors, three vice governors and 30 provincial board members, as well as additional seats for congressional representatives.

The idea was first broached in 2007 by then Palawan Vice Gov. David Ponce de Leon, but for many years it failed to make headway in Congress. This time, the House of Representatives was uncharacteristically quick on the draw, passing the measure on final reading in August this year, a mere five months after it was filed by Palawan's three lawmakers, and despite complaints that the process skirted public consultations with nongovernment and people's organizations in the province.

"We were blindsided by how fast this proposal came into being, without consulting the people, excluding Puerto Princesa," said Save Palawan Movement campaigner Cynthia Sumagaysay-Del Rosario. (Puerto Princesa City has opted out of the proposed breakup lest it be downgraded into either a component city or a municipality from its present status as a charter city.)

Other than political opportunism, there is a greater danger in the move to cut up Palawan: It may play into China's hands. The Philippines' superpower neighbor, which has transformed the Philippine islands it had seized in the South China Sea into military outposts bristling with runways, radars and missiles, would welcome the breakup of the province and use it to its advantage, warned international political risk analyst Anders Corr. Palawan is home to the Antonio Bautista Air Base, which has been the launching pad of joint US-Philippine military exercises in recent years meant to push back against China's aggression in the region.

"If China wants a military base in Palawan, mining rights or fishing rights, after the breakup it would have multiple officials with whom it can negotiate or bribe, playing one against the other," said Corr. Palawan's smaller LGUs would be "vulnerable to influence, infiltration or even takeover by a China that is increasingly made to feel welcome in Manila."

This appears to be not the usual subdivision of territory, but one that has "deep geopolitical repercussions," said Sen. Risa Hontiveros, the only senator who voted against HB 8055. "Instead of having to face a single strong provincial government which can mobilize the entire island in its own defenses, China will now have the opportunity to infiltrate and influence smaller government units."

Why is there no greater public outcry over this seeming rush to break up the Philippines' strategic frontier without any transparent, detailed scrutiny of its possible far-reaching national security implications, or even adequate consultations with affected constituencies?

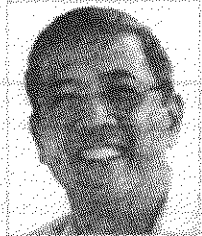
Something's afoot, and if the Filipino public isn't vigilant, it's not just Palawan that may end up grossly disadvantaged.



## CTALK CITO BELTRAN

### Re-thinking 'China'

**A**s I scanned the headlines after the state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping, the only impression I had was that nothing has changed as far as the locals are concerned. Our ruling class of intellectuals remains xenophobic. The same apprehensions, suspicions, and speculations versus China were expressed by many groups as well as politicians concerning the possible deals entered into by the Philippine government with China. The "guest" was still on the ground and already a number of speculative commentators were already crying out for the government to be transparent concerning all the loans and deals that President Duterte and President Xi Jinping had signed. Time was when the host country and people politely kept the commentary at bay until after the guest has left the house or our air space. But this time there was none of that. The critics and paranoid personalities seemed to feel obligated to hang their dirty linen in public.



They might say their fears are with reason and is borne out by history. There is no disputing the fact that China has reclaimed or built up island bunkers in the South China Sea and has aggressively patrolled and imposed their will against others in the region. There is no arguing that. But on the other hand, eight Chinese tourists were shot dead in a bungled hostage negotiation in Luneta, and one Taiwanese-Chinese fisherman who was shot by Philippine Coast Guard personnel. We in a manner of speaking drew first blood not just once but twice, albeit that it was done by psychos and not sanctioned or abetted by the Philippine government. If the Chinese were half as quarrelsome as some of our politicians and elite intellectuals are, what were the chances that parts of the Philippines would now have been occupied territory?

It is understandable to fear what we don't know. But perhaps it is now time for Filipinos to re-think "China" and discover China as a people, nation and unavoidably as allies instead of treating them as the unwelcomed rich neighbor who annoys everybody simply because they are bigger and better off in more ways than one.

It is undoubtedly hard to trust the Chinese coming from a history where our grandparents or great grandparents spoke Spanish, had Spanish names, were taught that the mestizos or mestizas were beautiful and desirable and where the local Chinese were called "Intsik" or "Beho" and treated disrespect-

fully. Of course it did not help that in their effort to preserve their culture and protect their ability to generate wealth through unity, that the Chinese also discriminated against non-Chinese, especially Filipinos from marrying into their clans. Many are the broken-hearted Filipinos and Filipino Chinese who went through life because of such "cultural" restraints.

Curiously, I wonder how Filipino sentiments would change about China if we did a massive genetic analysis of Pinoys to determine just how many and how much of us are actually more Chinese than anything? I've been told that somewhere, way, way up in the family tree of the Beltrams and the Salcedos (my Mom side), there was once a China Man who sported pigtails. That is as Chinese as you can get, I think?

After our Spanish colonial experience, we came under the Americans who used bullets and chocolates to win the hearts and minds of their "Little Brown brothers." Those were the "good old days" when all we ever used to watch was "American" TV such as *Combat* and *Rat Patrol* that portrayed Americans as heroes, the Germans and Japanese as enemies and the Chinese as Kung Fu masters or railroad slave labor. Ironically, while the Chinese were slave laborers on the US railways, Filipinos were migrant laborers in the pineapple and cotton farms living just a tad better than slaves.

Half of the food we bought, along with other consumer products, were "Proudly Made in USA." Most middle to upper class Filipinos born from the '20s to the '70s were brown skinned GI Joe wannabes. In fact most of my generation were raised toward dreams of going to the US and getting the coveted Green Card. By then the tables had turned because my generation lived and experienced the dreams of their parents only to discover that even with a Green Card you were never good enough and never American enough. The thing about all our pro-American mentality was because we were taught that they were our Big Brothers!

Unlike my many friends who stayed long in "the land of milk and honey," I found myself visiting, discovering Europe and eventually marrying someone from the Netherlands. Everything was very different than the "Good Old USA" or the culture and attitudes of Manila's elite mestizos. Once again I had to learn, unlearn and appreciate something different in terms of food, religion, culture even a lit bit of language. I was not forced or required to, it was such a welcome experience to hear, see, smell, touch, and compare a totally new world. This particular experience taught me to open my eyes to the WORLD and not just parts of it. We cannot begin to know what to do or how to deal with China if we don't change our mindset. I recently came across a quotation related to changing mindset that really brings this message together. It is from Damien Thomas, a British actor:

"If you change your mindset, you have the ability to change your world." Perhaps it's time to....\*

## A LAW EACH DAY

[Keeps Trouble Away]

JOSE C. SISON

### Foreboding signs

The first state visit in 13 years of China's President Xi Jinping, highlights a very significant, abrupt and critical shift in our foreign policy. Of course there is nothing wrong with developing warm, diplomatic relations and amity with other countries of the world. But there must also be some line of action, guidelines and principles we should observe and follow in forging ties with them.



First and foremost of course is the form of government and ideology of the country we are dealing with. The Philippines is a democratic and republican state where sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them (Section I, Article II Constitution of the Philippines). Therefore, in its relations with other states the paramount consideration should be the national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest and right to self determination of our country (Section 7 Idem).

We must also bear in mind that China is reputed to be the seedbed of communism where a totalitarian government through a single political party owns and controls all property including industry allegedly in the name of the people. Obviously our ideology is directly opposed and contrary to the Chinese ideology. While this difference does not mean that we should adopt a belligerent attitude toward this country, we should not, however, be subservient and must always maintain our sovereignty and independence.

But in the two-day state visit of Xi Jinping, so many signs indicate that we are more subservient rather than independent from this country. This sign is primarily manifested and even emphasized by Duterte's pivot from our previous friendly and amicable relation with the United States of America which has been our long time ally and protector especially in the preservation of our democratic ideals.

Most noticeable in this connection are some breaches in protocol especially in the welcome ceremonies at Malacanang Palace. No Philippine flag on the left side of the aisle was borne by any flag bearer unlike in other state visits. Only the Chinese flag was carried and displayed as the two leaders marched to the Palace for the formal meeting. People are also wondering why Duterte was walking behind rather than beside Xi Jinping. Such scene has elicited so many uncomplimentary comments, like that which says that we have already become a "colony or province" of China.

Then during the first day of the meeting, a total of 29 agreements have been allegedly signed between China and the Philippines covering business and

tourism. But none of the said agreements have published or publicly made known. This lack of transparency in government transactions is clearly one of the practices of a totalitarian government like China. We should not have adopted such practice but instead discussed and published them for more transparency which is one of the hallmarks of democracy.

Most significant and important among these agreements is the oil and gas exploration agreement with China in the disputed maritime areas. As it now turns out, the sharing in said deal is more favorable to China which will get 60 percent share compared to the Philippines' share of 40 percent. This somewhat inequitable sharing has apparently forced Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. to explain that the gas deal is only an "agreement to agree." Such kind of deal is quite novel indeed. This is likewise true with regards to the alleged foreign aids promised by China. It is not quite clear whether said offer actually consists of loans rather than aids. Thus the Senate is now compelled to conduct a hearing in order to determine the real deal.

Duterte's preference and more favorable treatment of China even caused most Filipinos to recall and believe Duterte's previous off the cuff remark on the shift in his administration's foreign policy as far as the US and China is concerned. The first time he announced such shift at the onset of his administration, he mentioned something about his personal grudge against the US because he was denied a US visa as the very reason for becoming friendlier with China than with the US. Obviously his basis for the foreign policy shift in this regard is more personal than national. The peoples' interest and welfare are not foremost in his mind.

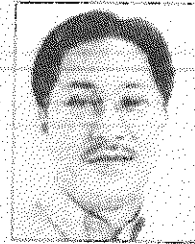
In this connection, it is more appropriate to cite again the controversy involving the West Philippine Sea, particularly the Scarborough shoal where China was already undertaking some military and economic activities. Because of such activities, the Philippines filed a case before the UN International Arbitral Tribunal claiming that said territory is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone pursuant to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). And a decision was already issued in our favor declaring that said area is indeed included within the Philippine Economic Zone. China however ignored and refused to follow said decision. Apparently, Duterte sided with China in this regard and declared that we cannot really assert our rights over the area because we don't have the military strength to counter China's superior forces.

The worst part here is that recently, his own spokesman, Salvador Panelo even admitted that the said decision of the International Tribunal is "useless": "*walang panalo diyan*." Even Duterte himself conceded that said area really belongs to China: "*Sa China na, sa China na yan*" to the extent of issuing warnings against other nations not to conduct any operations therein.

At this stage therefore we should be more vigilant in ensuring that Duterte's shift to a more favorable foreign relation with China would not lead to graver consequences particularly the adoption of a totalitarian regime in our country and the perpetration of treasonous acts.

## GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC



### Joint exploration: Guard against repeat of sellout

Full disclosure is needed in any joint oil-and-gas exploration by the Philippines and China in the Recto (Reed) Bank. That's so experts can alert Rody Duterte about potential pitfalls. Aptly he has been cautioned to first settle maritime jurisdictional tiffs with China. It's but right for any party to gauge a partner's trustworthiness. Four in five Filipinos (84 percent) are wary of Beijing. Diplomacy is the President's prerogative but every Filipino's right to know. Future generations depend on today's acts. Duterte sees offshore fossil-fuel extraction as the catch-up for Filipinos with their rich neighbors. He's doing it with the very regional bully that's grabbing Manila's 200-mile exclusive economic zone. Every Filipino must be watchful.

Already a past president had let China unconstitutionally explore Philippine territorial and continental seabed. That Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking, 2004-2007, encompassed the Palawan Sea 12 miles from shore and oil-rich Recto Bank a little beyond. It was kept secret from the public. Filipinos would have been clueless, had not a Singapore think tank gotten hold of and disclosed the provisos and maps. Without Congress consent \$5 million was plunked into it by Malacañang. Yet Manila got no copy of the scientific report. It was forfeited when the President, under fire from an enraged people, no longer could renew the JMSU in 2008.

By the mere wordings alone Philippine sovereignty and rights were surrendered. Undisputedly territorial and exclusive zones were designated as "disputed waters." In 2009 Beijing went to the United Nations unilaterally to file ownership of the entire South China Sea. It based its nine-dash line chart on unfounded historic rights. Undoubtedly from the JMSU it had gleaned data that the area near Palawan is oil rich. In fact, it is. The Nido, Matinloc, Galoc, Linapacan, and Balabac fields had been productive since the 1970s and 1980s. That's why foreign and domestic firms were securing Service Contracts to explore and extract in nearby Sampaguita Field in Recto Bank. Much later Beijing sent warships to shoo away the exploration vessels. Under its spurious claim, even Malampaya gas field, from which Luzon gets nearly half its power, would be Beijing's.

In exchange for the JMSU, China flooded Manila with \$4 billion in loans and options. Among the projects was a NorthRail that was never laid down but which Filipinos paid \$783 million. Another was the foiled \$330-million national broadband network, that included \$200-million kickback. At least \$10 million was paid out on signing in Boao, Hainan, with China's 50-percent state-owned ZTE Corp. Yet another was an unconstitutional grant to ZTE International of gold mining rights in Mount Diwalwal, Com-

postela Valley.

Lessons can be learned from that recent past.

(Read more in my compilation of columns, "Exposés: Investigative Reporting for Clean Government," Anvil Publishing, 2012, available at National Bookstores.)

Not only Super-typhoon Yolanda rehabs are long delayed. Graft was alleged in certain emergency works five years ago. Those too are taking so long to resolve. Only now, for one, are responses being taken from officials of Eastern Samar accused of plundering repair funds.

Raps were filed as far back as March 2016 at the Ombudsman-Visayas by Guiuan residents Kiriath Tumanda and Avelino Balagbis Jr. Supposedly bloated were repair costs of 59 barangay halls and 28 civic-daycare centers.

From P35,700 to P89,000 per square meter was spent to repair each standard 28-sqm structure. In contrast, the DPWH repair of similar 28-sqm classrooms in Guiuan was only P16,700 per sqm. Overprice allegedly ranged from P1.05 million to P2 million for the 87 barangay halls and civic-daycare centers, totaling P112 million.

Details were taken from the official programs of work. Doorknobs cost P2,000 each, half-inch plywood sheets P1,000, and 16-mm rebars P450 - when those were priced in local hardware stores at only P500, P650-

P800, and P230-P260, respectively.

Repairs at the town hall and public market allegedly cost too much too. And there was double funding for some of the projects.

Impleaded were mayor Christopher Sheen Gonzales, municipal engineer Arsenio Salamida, and then-DILG Region VIII director Pedro Noval Jr. The mayor's brothers Vicente Leo and Mark Pol purportedly supplied the materials and labor, fronting for Gonzales no less and wife Eloisa Libanan.

An employee of the Gonzales spouses, Elyra Lace, swore that she was ordered to accept payments and issue receipts in behalf of Homonhon Enterprises. She claimed to have cashed the check payments at the bank and handed them over to the mayor. It turned out that, allegedly without her knowledge, she had been registered as the company owner.

Several other local officials were implicated. The Gonzaleses deny any wrongdoing. The Ombudsman-Visayas must evaluate the evidence and responses fast. It's only fair - for the accusers, the accused, and the victims of the super-typhoon and possible super-sleaze.

Catch *Sapol* radio show, Saturdays, 8-10 a.m., DWIZ (882-AM).

Gotcha archives on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jarius-Bondoc/1376602159218459> or The STAR website <https://beta.philstar.com/columns/134276/gotcha>.

# A new era of peace, progress in Mindanao

**T**AUSUGS played a major role in the effort to set up the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Deputy Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Nabil Tan said this weekend, following a series of forums held in Jolo, Sulu, as part of the preparations for the plebiscite on January 21, 2019, to ratify the law creating the region.

The Bangsamoro Organic Law, he said, is based on all the peace agreements between the government and the Moro fronts - the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) - and reflects the aspirations of the Moro people for genuine political autonomy.

It is reassuring to hear these words from Tan and other Tausug leaders who are members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, in view of apprehensions that the BARMM, for which the MILF fought a long-running fight against government forces, may not have the same measure of support from the MNLF of Nur Misuari, a Tausug leader from Western Mindanao.

During the months that President Duterte talked with the MILF leaders on the proposed Bangsamoro region espoused by the MILF, he said he hoped to convince Misuari to join the talks - "so that if there are corrections or maybe additions or provisions that would not sit well with the Tausugs and the rest of the southern part of Mindanao, maybe we realize altogether the friction of the

MILF, MNLF, and the rest of Mindanao."

Misuari had served many years as governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), established during the administration of President Corazon Aquino as provided for in the 1987 Constitution. The ARMM will now be replaced by the BARMM upon ratification this January.

The people of five provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-tawi, and the cities of Marawi, Lamitan, Cotabato, and Isabela, along with six towns in Lanao del Norte and 39 barangays in North Cotabato, Basilan, and Sulu are due to vote in the plebiscite.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, there are 3.45 million Muslims and around 320,000 Christians in the ARMM, who will make up the bulk of the population of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. Last September, Moro and Christian religious leaders, along with leaders of the Moro revolutionary fronts, gathered in Davao City for a peace dialogue and signed a manifesto to make "inclusive peace and progress in the future Bangsamoro government an imperative undertaking so that no sector and community will be left out of the process."

With all these expressions of support from the various groups that make up the Bangsamoro region, we look forward to a new era of peace and progress in this part of the country, which we all hope will go a long way in correcting the historical injustice the Moro people have suffered over the centuries.

## PUNCHLINE

# PH, China sign 29 deals, vow to elevate relations



By FRED M. LOBO

**T**HE Philippines and China have committed to elevate their relations to a "comprehensive and strategic partnership" as they signed an oil and gas exploration accord and 28 other landmark agreements.

"Historic milestone," said PH. "Productive," said China.

"With mutual respect, sincerity and adherence to sovereign equality, I will continue to work closely with President Xi," said Duterte. And "we will continue to manage contentious issues," vowed visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Peace and prosperity - not conflict and war - will be the focus, they vowed.

Agreements on trade and investment cooperation, infrastructure development, agriculture, education, and other areas were signed following the meeting between Pres. Duterte and Pres. Xi in Malacañang.

Accords inked, mutual concerns and hearts hopefully linked.

Duterte said Xi's two-day state visit to the Philippines was a "historic milestone" for the friendly relations between the two countries, marking the first state visit of a Chinese President in 13 years.

"(We) discussed how we can further enhance functional cooperation in key work areas, such as bilateral trade and two-way investments promotion. We tackled infrastructure development, particularly China's participation in projects under our Build, Build, Build program," he said.

Malacañang said the agreements included a "memorandum of understanding on cooperation on oil and gas development" between the Philippines

and China, with an exchange of documents done by Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Loocin Jr. and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during the Palace ceremony.

Part of efforts to lessen the country's dependence on imported oil, the Palace said.

Also signed were a memorandum of understanding on cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative, an infrastructure cooperation program, a feasibility study for Davao City Expressway project, a feasibility study for Panay-Guimaras-Negros islands bridges project, and project management consultancy of the Philippine National Railways South Long Haul Project-North-South Railway Project.

Plus a loan agreement on New Centennial Water Source Kaliwan Dam Project, a commercial contract of Safe Philippines Project Phase 1, a MOU on basic education cooperation, MOU on ICT cooperation, cooperation on industrial parks development, a protocol for phytosanitary requirement for export of fresh young coconuts and frozen fruits, and MOU on panda bonds.

Xi said he had a "friendly, in-depth, and productive" meeting with Duterte and that they had charted the future course of China-Philippine relations and crafted an "ambitious blueprint" for development.

"The President and I both agreed to elevate our relationship into one of comprehensive, strategic cooperation. This vision charts a clear course for China-Philippines relations and sends a strong message to the world that our two countries are partners in seeking common development," the Chinese leader added.

"Both countries must make determined effort to make good neighborly

and cooperative relations, and write a new chapter in China-Philippine ties," he said. "China and the Philippines have a lot of common interests. We will continue to manage our contentious issues, promote friendly maritime cooperation through friendly consultation."

The Xi mind frame unraveled.

Xi said both sides agreed that there was "no-one-size-fits-all" development models and that every country has the right to choose its own path.

"As our two countries forge ahead as win-win partners, China will continue to do its modest best to help and support the Philippines," he assured.

Duterte said he also tackled with Xi cooperation on the reconstruction of Marawi, the Philippines' participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative, mutual concerns on tourism, agriculture, defense, security, maritime cooperation, law enforcement, transnational crime, as well as "strengthening our partnership in combating the trafficking of illegal drugs."

"I am pleased with the current positive momentum of the Philippines-China relations. There is a deepening trust and confidence [between] our governments, and we have greatly increased dialogue and interaction on many levels," he added.

"In the past two years, we have worked hard to lay the cornerstones for the continued advancement of our beneficial cooperation in a wide range of areas. A lot of work remains, but President Xi's visit gives us new impetus to our mutual efforts to enhance collaboration in ensuring the well-being of our peoples and contributing to peace and stability in the region," Duterte said.

Yes to peace, stability, and prosperity. Make them happen through resort to the best brand of goodwill and diplomacy.

## Editorial

### No need to monetize or pad a state visit to prove its merits

CAN 29 signed agreements and the palpable rapport between President Rodrigo Duterte and President Xi Jinping pass as a worthy harvest from the two-day state visit of the Chinese leader to the Philippines?

Because the Philippine government and the Filipino public have made it a habit of monetizing a state visit whenever our President visits a foreign land, we will shortly see a fitful effort to calculate the values, quantify the positives, and evaluate the net gain from the recent visit of President Xi.

It will not be enough for Messrs Xi and Duterte to say in their joint statement that the Chinese leader's visit "gives them new impetus to their efforts to enhance collaboration in ensuring the well-being of our peoples and contributing to peace and stability in the region." Or for them to declare that they have "turned a new page and are ready to write a new chapter of openness and cooperation in Chinese-Philippine relations."

It won't be enough also, as Filipino communicators have tried to do, to announce that China and the Philippines signed a total of 29 agreements during the state visit.

Politicians and investigative journalists will want to see the fine print in the agreements to verify the substance of the agreements, and to ensure that the list was not just padded to make the visit impressive.

The bean counters among us will seek to monetize the visit to prove that welcoming or cheering Mr. Xi was worth the effort and the holiday declared by one city government.

In fact, these are not the most reliable yardsticks for evaluating the success or shortcomings of a state visit.

The state visit of a head of state to another nation is essentially the highest expression of diplomatic relations between two states. It requires the exercise of statecraft to address issues and concerns of vital importance to the two states, and to forge a closer relationship.

By definition, according to one particular volume on modern diplomacy, "Statecraft is the use of the assets or resources and tools (economic, military, intelligence, media) that a state has to pursue its interests and to affect the behavior of others, whether friendly or hostile. It involves making sound assessments and understanding where and on what issues the state is being challenged and can counter a threat or create a potential opportunity or take advantage of one."

The true significance of a state visit lies in how it advances the respective interests of both states, and their common interest in the region and in the world.

Because China is today the biggest economy in the world and one of the world's major global powers, it is axiomatic that the Philippines will regard good relations with China as salutary. Because the Philippines is a leading member of Asean and is today a pacesetter in economic growth, China will naturally put high value in close ties with the Philippines. <sup>14</sup>

From a mainly Philippine perspective, there will be appreciation for the reaffirmation by China of its support for the ambitious bid of the Philippines to totally modernize all its infrastructure during the next five years.

Mr. Xi was right to underline the importance of "good neighborliness" during his visit to Manila. With over a thousand years of history in their relations, there is truly much to value in our bilateral relations. And there will be ample opportunities to enrich them in the days and years ahead.

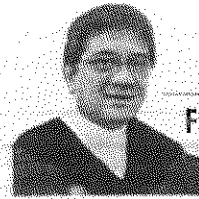
## Those troubled waters!

I DO not like it at all that, in different ways, we have behaved ourselves in unseemly obsequiousness towards China. No servility towards China, not to any country. There is no need to stir antagonism, and a becoming amity between nations is always best for the world, and particularly for a part of the world as strategically sensitive as Southeast Asia and its waters, the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea), to be specific. As for those activists who take to the streets whenever one of their leaders has had a bad dream or is suffering from a bad case of constipation, who always rile against the "imperialism" of the United States, why do I not hear a peep from them about the imperialism of the Middle Kingdom that continues to believe that it remains the center of the world — and swaggers about like it is?

Chinese planes fly to contested islands, disgorge flag-waving passengers in a plain and clear act of defiance in the face of the claims of other nations, the Philippines included. And all we do is stand by, seemingly afraid not to offend the bullies. What exactly has China done for the Philippines, and why should its expansionism be more welcome to us than the supposed imperialism of the US? China has offered us loans — and if loan is to be trusted (I have no reason to doubt its figures), then we might as well be borrowing from banks because the interest rates are as onerous.

No, it is wrong to say that the South China Sea is now in the "possession" of China. Possessing a swathe of sea does not make sense in international law, and as a matter of law, it is downright illegal. What it means is that China does not recognize the freedom of the high seas and draws boundaries of exclusion where it is minded to. *Ex injuria, non oritur jus*. No illegality can ever ripen into lawful title. Not even as a matter of fact should this "possession" of a maritime region so rich in resources and so vital to international trade as well as to regional security be countenanced and abetted. Inaction has consequences in international law; acquiescence is juridically significant — and so far, we have taken the dismal path of inaction and the cowardly stance of acquiescence. Quite shamefully, I must say. And while it might seem like all that we can do for now is complain and rant, protest and scream, these too are significant in the law of nations, for they constitute an assertion of our claims and our consistent rejection of the officiousness with which China brazenly makes its extravagant and really warrantless claims.

As for the Pangea theory that no power on earth can enforce the judgment of the arbitral tribunal that was favorable to the Philip-



FR. RANHILIO  
CALLANGAN  
AQUINO

ippines' assertion of sovereign rights over maritime zones and features in the West Philippine Sea that, in a sense, belabors the obvious and also commits the mistake of dealing with international law as some globalized version of municipal law. International law, being the law of fictively equal sovereigns (a necessary fiction!), there is and can be no "vertical enforcement" — enforcement by superior government or sovereign power. *Principes non recognoscentes superiorum*. So, if by enforcement we await the imposition by some higher level of government wielding the force equivalent to the armed forces or the police of a state, that will not be forthcoming for the plain reason that that is not the nature of international law. But when the Philippines is resolute about asserting its rights, that China takes offense should not be our concern, for it is plainly stupid to be reticent about asserting our rights for fear that others should be offended thereby, as long as we give no reason for offense. The most effective form of enforcement in the international area is "horizontal" — enforcement by the states themselves in the calibration of their relations with each other and in their collective determination to abide by law, even if largely out of self-interest.



A state that flaunts its disregard of the law invites lawless behavior by other states towards it. No state, no matter its size or might, can afford that. Not even China. That is the reason that despite its saber-rattling and continuous claim that Taiwan is a province of the PRC, it does not fire missiles in the direction of Taipei, which it could easily do. The world is watching, and the world will lay down the law. But what interest will the rest of the world have in insisting that China respect our rights when we do not appear enthusiastic about standing for our own?

There has been so much ranting against the US and its encroachment in the affairs of other countries, especially by those groups in our country that have left as their most visible achievements the graffiti that make Manila look so decrepit and decadent. Now I know that they are votaries of another power as ambitious if not more, as imperious if not worse, as devious if not more treacherous!

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## America vs China: How Asia can win

SO, who's  
S ahead  
in Asia's  
geopolitical  
main event  
between  
America and China?  
Answer: Asia.



REPUBLIC  
SERVICE  
RICARDO  
SALUDO

► SaludoA5

With the top superpower and the rising one jousting for regional support, no prizes for guessing that Asian nations, especially those in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), are getting buttered up with aid and trade, mostly from Beijing, and defense goodies, mainly from Washington.

Just see how President Rodrigo Duterte is wangling favor after favor from China, Japan and America. Much as his critics claim he has capitulated to Beijing's territorial violations, he has in fact obtained far greater aid from China, Japan and Russia than any other Philippine leader.

And if it finally transpires, the impending return of the Balangiga bells, seized by America's conquering troops after their heinous massacre of Filipinos over a century ago, would be another unprecedented superpower concession obtained by Duterte's independent foreign policy.

And now that visiting President Xi Jinping has agreed with Duterte to elevate the China-Philippines relations to "strategic cooperation," expect Japan and maybe the United States to also press for

some upgrading of ties, sweetened by more offers of assistance, investment and other goodies.

Multiply this scenario in varying degrees across Asean and that's, pretty much, the story of the regional rivalry between China and the United States in recent years all the way to last week's Asean summit meetings in Singapore and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

While media understandably focused on the verbal jousts in APEC between Xi and US Vice President Mike Pence, what really counted were not the phrases but the faces and the finances.

That is, who showed up to press the flesh with Asian leaders and what the US and China brought with them to spice the hi's and hello's.

In these two all-important markers, the winner by miles was China. With US President Donald Trump staying home, Pence is, well, trumped by Xi, especially in Asian eyes valuing formal titles.

So it was at the 2013 Asean and APEC summits, when then President Barack Obama was a no-

show, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton subbing. Plainly face time is of the essence in a region that goes overboard on saving face.

### It's the economy, stupid

Now, it might still have been a draw for Washington if billionaire Trump let money do the talking, with Pence offering big bucks to match Xi's zillions. But instead of cash and commerce, Pence talked tough on trade, and delivered unsolicited advice on Chinese loans.

It's no secret that APEC remains keen for even more open markets, despite Trump's about-face two years ago from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade and investment accord the US had erstwhile championed.

TPP signatories are trying to salvage it, sans Uncle Sam. And Asia-Pacific nations are working hard to get the Beijing-led Regional Cooperation Economic Program signed by next year.

So, APEC and Asean were hardly in any mood for Pence's trade war rhetoric and threats, which already undercut growth, exports, stock markets and currencies across Asia

over the past year.

Also sure to have lead-ballooned was his warning on borrowing too much from China. How can the US tell that to Asean countries with far lower debt, budget and trade deficit levels than America, and have been extra careful with foreign loans and trade balances since the 1997 Asian financial crisis?

The good news for Asia is that the US is gearing up to offer more cash for the region's growth. Last month Trump created the US International Development Finance Corp. to provide \$60 billion in loans, credit guarantees, and investment insurance to American companies investing in developing nations.

Bottom line: The charm race in Asean among America, China and Japan looks set to escalate. Beneficiary countries need to read the fine print and counter any disadvantageous terms and moves by aid givers. But that's a far better problem than having little assistance on offer.

### **Asia wants peace in the seas**

Uncle Sam predictably warned

of Chinese military deployment, including the so-called "wall of SAMs," or surface-to-air missiles, deployed by the People's Liberation Army and capable of striking anywhere in the South China Sea.

For sure, Asean is concerned about the reported installation of PLA anti-ship and anti-aircraft armaments in the disputed Spratly islands. And there may even be some support for the US and its allies challenging China's territorial claims with freedom of navigation operations, including US Navy sailings near Chinese-reclaimed islands.

But President Duterte encountered no loud challenges in Asia when he said that China had possession of the South China Sea, and criticized naval activity challenging the Chinese.

What Duterte presumably meant is that short of a full-scale war, which no nation wants, it is near-impossible to stop Chinese moves in the South China Sea. And forops by the US and its allies only escalate regional tensions without budging the Chinese.

Two US naval moves may signal

that Washington could be opting to avoid more confrontations in the South China Sea like the near-collision between US and Chinese naval vessels last month.

The much-hyped US naval exercise this month, said to be larger than usual, was held in the Philippine Sea west of the archipelago. And Beijing seemed to accept the joint American-Australian plan to build a naval base on Papua New Guinea.

With the Philippines not implementing the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement which the US sought for its plan to move 60 percent of its naval assets to Asia, Duterte's view of South China Sea military match-ups seems to hold for now.

That leaves China and Asean to sort out maritime security matters, mainly through the long-awaited Code of Conduct now being negotiated, while the US and its allies beef up defense west of the Philippines.

If this reduces tension and militarization on the high seas, especially if Beijing forges a code that truly advances peace, that's another plus for Asia.

## Do we have to choose between Xi and Trump?

AFTER  
A Chinese  
President Xi  
Jinping left  
Manila on  
Wednesday,  
I sat down



FIRST  
THINGS  
FIRST  
FRANCISCO  
S. TATAD

with some homegrown analysts to assess the impact of his two-day visit. They were

► Tatad A5

one in saying that Xi scored big with his charm and money offensive, and that the United States, China's Pacific rival, will have to do much, much more to match his initiative. Until President Rodrigo Duterte took over, the Philippines had been almost entirely an American preserve. Today, it is denisively referred to as a "Chinese province," and the 29 agreements signed during the visit, capped by a joint oil and gas exploration agreement on the contested South China (West Philippine) waters, seem to prove it.

These include agreements in trade and investment, banking and finance, infrastructure, agriculture, culture, education, people-to-people exchanges. There has been no detailed presentation of these agreements to show that each of the projects is affordable and necessary for the recipient. From Sri Lanka and Djibouti to Myanmar and Montenegro, *The New York Times* reported on Aug. 23, 2018, recipients of cash from the One Belt, One Road Initiative have discovered less than savory features of Chinese investments, including closed bidding processes that result in inflated contracts and the massive influx of Chinese labor at the expense of local workers.

### Exploiting the wretched

"Fear is growing," the report said, "that China is using its overseas spending spree to gain footholds in some of the world's most strategic places, and perhaps even deliberately luring vulnerable nations into debt traps to increase China's dominion as US influence fades in the developing world." Last August, the 93-year-old Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad came to China to stop a contract for the China Communications Construction Company to build the East Coast Rail Link, estimated at \$20 billion, along with a \$2.5 billion agreement for an arm of the Chinese energy giant to construct energy pipelines.

Malaysia did not need those projects and could not afford them, Mahathir said.

Of the 29 agreements signed during Xi's visit, the most sensitive and possibly most controversial is the joint oil and gas exploration agreement in the South China Sea, with a 60-40 percent sharing of the proceeds, in favor of the Philippines. Signed by Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. and Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yu on behalf of the Foreign Service Institute of the Philippines and the China Foreign Affairs University, the agreement has yet to be made public with all its details. The gov-

ernment has also yet to explain the choice of the contracting parties, which have nothing to do with oil and gas exploration. The FSIP, for its part, is known only as a training institute for diplomats, nothing else.

A senior member of the Supreme Court has expressed serious misgivings about the constitutionality of allowing China to jointly explore the Philippines' natural resources within its "own" territory, as confirmed by the July 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. In Congress, Senators Francis Pangilinan, Liberal Party president, and Antonio Trillanes 4th, DU30's well-known nemesis, have filed a Senate resolution seeking an inquiry into the agreement. The public needs to be sufficiently assured that the exploration agreement, assuming it is constitutionally sound, is not meant to deaden the Philippines' zeal for its territorial claim on the Spratlys.

But questions of national security have been provoked not only by this particular agreement, but even more strongly by the government's selection of the third telecommunications player, before Xi's arrival. This refers to the Mislattel consortium, made up of the government-owned China Telecom, the largest fixed-line provider and the third largest mobile telecom provider in China, and the Udena Corp., owned and controlled by Davao-based businessman Dennis Uy, whom some businessmen describe as the fastest growing businessman of his generation.

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## Who's Dennis Uy?

Who is Dennis Uy? The only thing we can say for now is that he is said to have contributed P30 million to DU30's presidential campaign; I hope to give you more in another column. And what is Udenna Corp? An article on Rappler by J.C. Punongbayan of the University of the Philippines describes Udenna as the fastest expanding company in the country, bar none.

It is the parent company of Phoenix Petroleum, which captured 6.2 percent of the petroleum market share in 2017, and of Chelsea Logistics, whose tanker fleet accounted for 18 percent of the industry's gross tonnage in 2017. On Phoenix Petroleum's 10th listing anniversary at the Philippine Stock Exchange in July 2017, hardly a presidential social activity, DU30 was the most important guest in attendance. Share price of Phoenix Petroleum has taken off since, according to the Punongbayan article.

Meanwhile, Udenna has been on a property acquisition spree. In July 2017, it acquired 100 percent of Enderun Colleges; in October 2017, 100 percent of Family Mart; in September 2018, 70 percent of Conti's Holding Corp. It is now trying to complete a 24-story Udenna Tower in Bonifacio Global City (BGC), and preparing to build a 177-hectare Clark Global City in Clark Freeport Zone in Pampanga.

In 2017, Udenna's debt grew by 200 percent from the previous year. But it posted an income of P4.1 billion, a 426 percent increase from the previous year. Unable to explain its phenomenal growth, some businessmen have described Udenna as the fastest growing "crony corporation" of the DU30 administration. Although Mislattel's entry as

the third telco player is originally billed as a deliberate move to break the telecom "duopoly" of PLDT-Smart and Globe Telecom, there is growing concern that the Chinese government's entry in the industry renders the country vulnerable to the dangerous practices of Chinese cybertechnology.

## More lethal than Russia

Highly qualified sources believe China has become the biggest state sponsor of cyberattacks against the West, even outpacing Russia, which is accused by US Democrats of having interfered in favor of Trump in the last US elections. Chinese cyber specialists are said to be actively engaged in misdirecting a large amount of internet traffic to China. If this is true, then there is nothing to prevent Mislattel from misdirecting a significant part of Philippine internet traffic to China. The threat to national security is therefore real, but because of the propaganda spin coming from Malacañang and Beijing, none of this is discussed at all.

China's money plays a major role in all this, but even more major than money is China's human rights politics. DU30's war on drugs and its extrajudicial killings (EJK) have riled the Western democratic institutions, but not a peep has been heard from China or the Chinese government. This has made Xi DU30's most comfortable natural ally, even without China's promised economic grants and investments. By contrast, Barack Obama had wanted to inquire into DU30's human rights record, so he quickly became a "son of a whore."

Trump avoided Obama's mistake by not saying one word about the killings. This made Trump

and DU30 kindred spirits. DU30 held off on his plan to scuttle the Philippine-US military alliance as defined by the Mutual Defense Treaty, the Visiting Forces Agreement, and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, and as he promised in Beijing in October 2016. He continues to flirt with the idea by accepting transfers of small arms from Beijing and Moscow, and by talking of wanting to acquire a submarine from Moscow. But he keeps himself in check, for so long as Trump maintains his silence on the extra-judicial killings.

In this, Trump behaves exactly like Xi, who will not say one word about the killings. This is not expected of Trump, but silence or inaction seems to have become Trump's new standard response to the most heinous crimes. In Istanbul, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was able to establish, apparently beyond reasonable doubt, that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the savage murder and dismemberment of Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate on October 2.

But Trump chose to ignore the CIA finding, and decided to focus instead on the Kingdom's \$110-billion military purchase from the US. "My relationship is with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," [not with the decent opinion of humankind, or with anybody else], he said.

In the case of the Philippines, where Trump did exactly nothing to counter Xi's initiative, his unspoken message seems to be very clear: "My relationship is with President Duterte, not with the Republic of the Philippines, or the Filipino people, or anybody else." So, when people ask how and why the US seems to have lost favor with the Filipinos, homegrown analysts answer: "Because the average Filipino still believes human rights are still worth fighting and even dying for, but Mr. Trump has yet to convince us he does."

## IN MEMORIAM

Former newspaperman, governor and congressman of Ifugao Gualberto "Bert" Lumawig, 85, died in the peace of our Lord after a lingering illness on November 18. His remains lie in state at the Loyola Memorial Chapels in Marikina. He will be buried after the 9 a.m. funeral mass on Tuesday. I ask the pious reader to offer a prayer for the repose of his soul. Thank you.

*fstatad@gmail.com*

## Memorandum of understanding



CROSSROADS

JONATHAN  
DE LA CRUZ

A MEMORANDUM of understanding is a formal agreement between two or more parties. Companies and organizations can use MOUs to establish official partnerships.

MOUs are not legally binding but they carry a degree of seriousness and mutual respect, stronger than a gentlemen's agreement. Often, MOUs are the first steps towards a legal contract. In US law, a memorandum of understanding is synonymous with a letter of intent which is a non-binding written agreement that implies a binding contract is to follow.

I had to refer to a legal dictionary to get the above definition of a memorandum of understanding just to ensure that I do not err on the side of ignorance in tackling what has become the most abused word this part of the globe during the two-day state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Yes, MOU

and MOUs were in vogue, on occasion disparagingly, by a lot of folks many of whom should have known better than even utter it. Such was the contrived toxicity which anti-Chinese critics of the Duterte administration brought to the forefront in a mean effort to deflate the value of this visit.

To no avail. The visit went well without any untoward incident and the initiatives agreed to by the parties on a number of fronts may be considered breakthroughs following the cooling of our relations with the world's second-biggest economy and regional powerhouse during the past administration.

Indeed, the contrivance was so disgustingly hollow it only showcased the narrow-mindedness of those who have it a habit of opposing President Duterte no matter what. Which does not, of course, speak well of the standing of these people as leaders of note. For how can one be so tricky and unforgiving to the point of being unpatri-

otic shoving off the country's interest in order to put Duterte and our relations with China in a bad light. What should have been a major coup of sorts for the country as we navigate the tricky waters of international diplomacy with what was billed as a major, even historical, visit by the most powerful Chinese leader in recent memory was dragged to the gutters on the issue of MOUs.

Using "transparency" as defined by them as their cover, Vice President Leni Robredo and some senators went to town demanding that all the MOUs and other agreements signed during the Xi visit be reviewed, insinuating in the process that China is a duplicitous partner and will only take advantage of us. Or, worse, that President Duterte cannot be trusted to stand his ground and work for the country's best interests. And all because they "need" to check whether the two- or three-page MOUs will redound to our best interests.

Come on, how can a two- or three-pager compromise our interests?

Take the case of the MOU on the "Joint Maritime Oil and Gas Exploration between China and the Philippines" which some senators have already judged as disadvantageous to the country. These guys even went to the extent of suggesting that the same will compromise our national security. How, we don't know and they did not elaborate. Only that they think or maybe even believe that the same will not redound to our best interest. A4

Well, here's the catch. These guys were waving a so-called Chinese draft which, if the reports are correct, was titled "Framework Agreement on Joint Maritime Oil and Gas Exploration between China and the Philippines." Nothing definite, just like a letter of intent as advised by the administration. In fact, DFA Secretary Teddy Boy Locsin even ignored this so-called Chinese draft saying if there is going to be any draft MOU on the subject it will have to be written by us not the Chinese. So, he advanced the information that, indeed, he wrote the final draft on a piece of cloth which was what was signed by

Turn to A5

C09



## Memorandum...

From A4

the parties. Not the earlier one prepared by the Chinese which was the basis for the senators' outburst.

It was Philippine ambassador to China Chito Sta. Romana who confirmed that indeed what "was signed was essentially the Philippine counter-draft with some new revisions

and is significantly different from what Senator Trillanes released," the same draft which Secretary Locsin said he did himself on a cloth. So Trillanes and the senators including Robredo have no place to go except take cover for their harsh and premature exertions. And Ambassador Sta. Romana is right—the draft was a "prelude to a more specific agreement for exploring and finding out if there really is oil and gas that can be exploited in the future." He advisedly

noted that "an effort has been made to come to an agreement and to be able to present it to the public and to be able to face the test of judicial scrutiny and constitutionality."

And I might add this, on whether the possibility of a joint undertaking would be legal and constitutional. At this point, no one can even suggest any kind of malice, stupidity or duplicity on the part of the signatories to this MOU. So, what are these guys raising hell over?

Even professor Jay Batongbacal, who heads the University of the Philippines Institute for Maritime Affairs and who is one of the loudest critics of the Duterte administration's conciliatory gestures to the Chinese noted that the document "doesn't amount to a contract" and is "more like a record of what they talked about and agreed on in principle." He had early advised that both sides would "sign some kind of general statement/s or 'framework'...

with legal and implementation details left out for later." Which is what happened in the case of this MOU on oil and gas exploration.

There is no question that apart from the loan and commercial agreements as well as consultancy and grants agreements, all MOUs remain as such—an agreement in principle a little more than a gentlemen's agreement to be fleshed out at some future date.

What's wrong with that?

# Is Panelo speaking for Xi?



IF PRESIDENTIAL Spokesman Salvador Panelo can't seem to say anything right, his best contribution would be to keep his silence on matters outside his area of competence. Speaking in the aftermath of the two-day state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Panelo said no nation, not the US nor the United Nations, can enforce The Hague arbitration ruling in favor of the Philippines.

That sounds like abject surrender of our sovereign right in the West Philippine Sea where China is staring down our Navy and shooing away Filipino fishermen. As it is, many Filipinos protesting China's aggression in our territorial waters and pushing its boundaries through a nine-dash line in the

South China Sea were aghast that Panelo seems to be speaking more for Xi Jinping rather than for the Philippines. I'm not advocating a saber-rattling stand against China but let's also not convey a splayed legs national security policy.

Even if it's true that the US nor the UN cannot enforce The Hague ruling rejecting China's sweeping claim of nearly the entire South China Sea, why should Panelo publicly concede it? That would embolden further China's aggressive stance in the region. Why not keep the Chinese guessing whether the US or the UN will step in to intercede in this incendiary issue?

If Panelo has an iota of knowledge of

international relations, he should know that the US or the UN are not the only ones who would help defend the Philippines. Countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia also have stakes in the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea lanes for their commercial cargo vessels.

International issues are best left to Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teddy Locsin, the former Philippine Ambassador to the United Nations in New York. But Locsin was kept busy by the two-day state visit of the Chinese President so it was Panelo who answered questions on the enforcement of The Hague ruling.

Aside from the sensitive oil and gas joint exploration deal, the Senate wants to review the 28 other Memoranda of Understanding signed between Manila

and Beijing. I cannot comment on these MOUs since I am not privy to their details. Vice President Leni Robredo also urged Malacanang to be transparent and make public the contents of the MOUs.

Somehow the 60-40 sharing scheme of the oil and gas joint exploration was leaked by whistleblowers inside Malacanang. Critics pounced on the deal despite the 60-40 sharing in favor of the Philippines. Why should the Philippines share with China oil and gas exploration when it is in the West Philippine Sea—our sovereign territory? Since the equipment and other technical tools in the exploration will surely be provided by China, what is the guarantee the Philippines will get its stipulated bigger share of the deal? The critics' question, not mine.

Malacañang officials point to the country's railway, bridges and

Turn to A5

*"I am not for a splayed-legs national security policy."*

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## Is Panelo...

From A4

other infrastructure projects China is financing as the benefits we are reaping in the close ties with Beijing. But critics claim the Philippines is falling into China's debt trap.

Acting Supreme Court Chief Justice Antonio Carpio disputed China's historic claim to the entire South China Sea which cited Chinese explorer Zheng He's visits to Manila, other parts of Luzon and the Visayas way back in the old days of pre-Philippine-China relations. But just because Zheng He visited these parts of the Philippines does not mean China can lay claim to the waters well within our territory.

Carpio, a staunch defender of Philippine territorial sovereignty, insists the country also has ancient maps disputing China's historic claim. Maps are better evidence than self-serving claims written by Chinese historians, he said.

Senator Risa Hontiveros also urged President Duterte to assert Philippine sovereignty in the West Philippine and not kowtow to Xi Jinping. But of course her concern and of the opposition Liberal Party will simply be dismissed by the administration as obstructionist reaction. Fortunately, the Senate decision to review these deals is a bipartisan action. We can expect Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez to be in the hot seat to answer the senators' probing questions.

# Win-win

The comprehensive strategic cooperation sealed between Presidents Rodrigo Duterte and Xi Jinping brings the country's relations with the People's Republic of China (PROC) at par with those of the United States.

The upgraded relations realized Rody's independent foreign policy which Foreign Affairs Secretary Teddy Boy Locsin redefined as "friends to friends, enemies to enemies and worse enemies to false friends."

Making the PROC an ally on the same plane as that of traditional powers led by the US Asianizes the traditionally western-oriented diplomacy of the country.

Most of all, a strategic alliance with the PROC is a neutrality stamp that the country can invoke when conflict heightens in the region, primarily in the event of the feared skirmish between the two superpowers over the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Aside from the US, the Philippines also has similar ties with Japan and Vietnam while a similar deal is being negotiated with Australia. Such partnerships are comprehensive, involving economic, political and socio-cultural.

With the elevation of bilateral relations to a strategic level, closer cooperation is also expected in military and maritime matters.

In 2011, a strategic partnership with Japan was formalized through a joint statement issued by President Noytoy Aquino and then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda.

Closer ties with the PROC will mainly be on economic pursuits primarily in carrying out the country's key role in the Belt and Road Initiative that seeks to fulfill the pledge of the Asian giant of shared prosperity to its neighbors.

The comprehensive strategic cooperation will be based on mutual respect, mutual understanding and sovereign equality which are basic components of diplomatic partners that Noytoy, however,

missed in his belligerent tack towards the PROC.

On maintaining harmony in the contested seas, the PROC and the Philippines agreed to jointly safeguard the maritime lanes with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Such an arrangement will do away and make redundant the US claim that its military deployment in the region is meant to guarantee the trade routes allow safe passage.

Rody said China has stood on the right side of history in dealing with international affairs and that the government is ready to carry out closer communication and coordination with China "within multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations."

The President had said the conflicting claims will be raised when relations have been strengthened to allow disputes, even those which are very contentious, to be resolved similar to deep problems being settled within a family.

China also needs the country's backing in assuring regional stability in Southeast Asia.

Xi said the PROC never engaged in imperialist tendencies unlike western nations. His country's interest is apparently to maintain order in the WPS since the disputes stand as a barrier that prevents the PROC and ASEAN countries from forging closer relations.

Many see a resolution of the conflict lies mainly on how relations between the PROC and the Philippines will proceed.

The strategic relations are not an exclusive agreement since the PROC has established various forms of strategic partnership with nearly 25 percent of the countries in the world. The Philippines now joins nine other ASEAN countries as China's strategic partners.

Vietnam, which has on several occasions had serious military friction with its giant neighbor, still maintains strategic ties of cooperation.

Chinese experts, however, said the partnership still needs further groundwork aimed at achieving peace and concrete development.

The result can be immense for the country as the Philippines can get needed financial help in engineering economic progress and strengthening social development. Financial stability will help the country in its quest of becoming a Southeast Asian power.

Putting the maritime disputes in the back burner and instead working for cooperation will contribute to regional peace and stability which is a common aim of both countries. The strategic partnership defined the friendship between both countries since Rody assumed power.

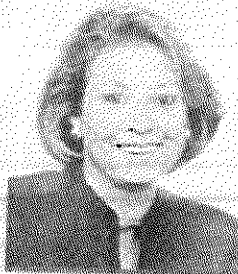


“  
Putting  
the  
maritime  
disputes in  
the back  
burner...  
will  
contribute  
to  
regional  
peace and  
stability.”

# Useless arguments

**“ One wonders why these senators and the usual yellows never said anything when China started to build the artificial island in the disputed sea.**

Some senators uselessly argued with a Palace spokesman over the comatose issue that neither the Philippines and its government nor any other international body or military power can implement The Hague arbitration ruling that, in part, favors the Philippines, but in another part, rejected Philippine ownership of Scarborough Shoal.



**FRONTLINE**  
Ninez Cacho-Olivares

international police or military that can implement the (PCA) ruling, it is still important for the government to hold on to the ruling. Who knows? Someday, we may be able to implement that judgment militarily or economically,” Escudero said.

Really? How so, pray tell?

But election time is nigh and media exposure is a must for politicians, especially those seeking elective seats in 2019, whether through a senatorial reelection or a local election.

At least two senators were said to have been dismayed by Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo’s statement that the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling is “useless at this time.”

Panelo may not be the best example of a presidential and Palace spokesman. However, in this instance, he certainly was being truthful and realistic while the two senators were not.

Outgoing Sen. Francis Escudero, who is running for a local post, was quoted as saying that, even if the Philippines cannot enforce the ruling, it is still important for the government to uphold it. Has this PCA ruling been rejected by the Duterte administration or merely placed in the back burner for now?

“Even if we cannot militarily uphold the arbitral ruling, even if there is no

Sen. Grace Poe, who is also seeking reelection, pitched in, saying the arbitration ruling only becomes useless when the government does not use it.

“It is useless if we do not use it, useless if we do not respect it (ruling). Why say it is useless then? We should use this for us to have an edge. What is sad is that we ourselves do not recognize the ruling,” she said.

These two senators really appear to be misrepresenting Palace statements and even those made at various times by the President himself. They certainly are aware of these presidential statements, yet they insist on spinning these. Instead they follow the yellow President’s confrontational stance toward China, a policy that got the Philippines nothing. This includes losing Scarborough Shoal, a traditional fishing ground for Filipino fishermen, which the PCA ruled to be a free fishing area for all fishermen, both foreign and local.

It has been made clear by President Duterte that he does not reject the PCA ruling. What he stressed is that the South China Sea issue is to be placed on the back burner. Instead, the country’s pivot to China is strengthening diplomatic relations and friendship which has certainly brought about benefits for the country and

its people.

Moreover, with the issue tamped down, there has been relative peace in the disputed sea, with the US disturbing the peace once too often, despite the fact that it is not even a party to the PCA suit filed by the Philippines under then President Noynoy Aquino.

Where did the Aquino confrontational policy get the country and its people? So, we kept on claiming the part of the South China Sea, which the Philippines unofficially renamed the West Philippine Sea (WPS), is ours, even when the PCA ruling didn’t say this is so. What it said was that China’s nine-dash line claim had no legal basis.

Panelo did say on the day of China leader Xi Jinping’s arrival that the PCA’s ruling in favor of the Philippines against China’s claims is “useless for now.”

He was quoted as saying, “The arbitral ruling cannot be taken away from us. It will be there forever but, meanwhile, who will enforce it? There is no power on Earth that can enforce it. The United Nations cannot. The United States cannot.”

To be clear and fair Panelo was only asked by media if the ruling is useless, to which Panelo replied: “As of now? Yes. But as I said, we can get what we are supposed to have by negotiation.”

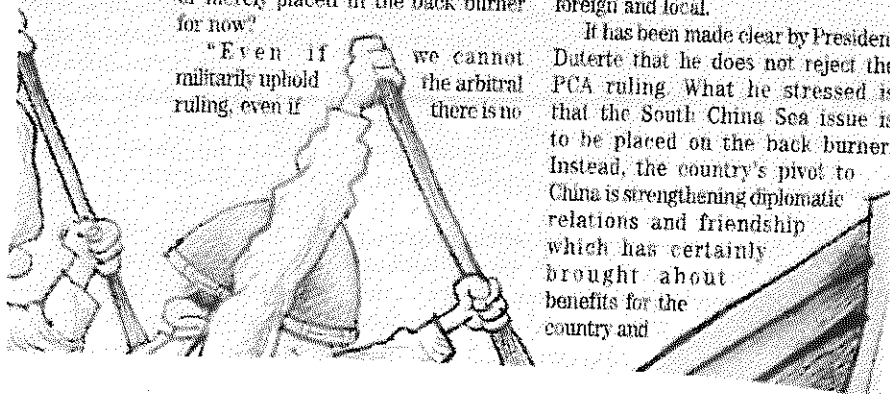
That’s the frigging truth, even if the choice of words is not exactly appropriate in this instance.

The media should have asked whether the PCA ruling is implementable instead of asking whether the ruling is useless, because it is not, since the ruling stays.

And, these senators and other yellows are making an issue out of this. Just what is it that they want to happen? For the administration to keep on asserting publicly that the WPS is ours and that China and her artificial islands should leave the area?

One wonders why these senators and the usual yellows never said anything when China started to build the artificial island in the disputed sea when this project was ongoing for years.

It’s time for these critics, including Social Weather Stations, to get real.



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# "Are you alright Mr. Senator?"

Hardly had he recovered from his amnesty travails that had him seeking refuge and safety within the confines of the Senate, outgoing Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV was at it again recently when he criticized President Rodrigo Duterte's absence in several Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit events in Singapore due to his power naps.

*“Trillanes for all intents and purposes has made himself an afterthought, one who is lost in his own web of lies and fairy tales.”*

Maybe for want of anything to harp on not unlike a predator waiting for a prey's mistake, the President's fiercest critic pounded on the issue like it was a mortal sin, even pointing out that the President's naps could be indicators of his present health condition or just plain laziness on the

Chief Executive's part.

"Either way, that's a big problem for our country," he was quoted as saying.

The 73-year-old Duterte, who missed four of the 11 meetings he was slated to attend as well as a gala dinner hosted by Singapore leader Lee Hsien Loong, wondered why critics like Trillanes are making a big fuss about his absence.

"What's wrong with my nap," Duterte asked, pointing out he had to catch up with his sleep, having slept only three hours the night before. Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo gave assurances the President's absence in some events had nothing to do with his physical health and well-being as speculated by some quarters.

Even Senators Panfilo Lacson and Franklin Drilon, an opposition stalwart, saw nothing wrong with Duterte's absence, saying other heads of state also skipped some events.

"He may have intentionally skipped the events because he was evading something," Lacson was quoted as saying, referring

to the gathering between the ASEAN heads of state and Canada and Australia.

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*It seems  
the more  
he rants  
against the  
President,  
the more  
Duterte  
becomes  
popular.*

Drilon, on the other hand, said power naps are good for the country: “They help rejuvenate our hardworking leaders. We all need time to rest and recoup from too many hours of hard work.”

Of course, Trillanes will have none of those, even if they come from an independent-minded legislator and a leader of the opposition. For Trillanes, Duterte will always be a punching bag who could do nothing right. It's as if he sees a bull's eye at the back of the Chief Executive.

Since wooing and being turned down by then Davao City Mayor Duterte to be his running mate in the 2016 presidential elections, Trillanes has zeroed in on Duterte like a woman scorned. He took the rejection personally and attacked the President from all angles on almost all issues from the drug war, the death squads, the economy, the Marawi siege, martial law in Mindanao, millions in bank deposits, foreign policy, ghost employees, alleged loss of territory to China, rice smuggling, human rights violations, corruption and just about any issue that he could think of.

About a year ago, he also predicted Duterte's downfall. However, it seems the more he rants against the President, the more Duterte becomes popular and trusted as shown by recent surveys.

Trillanes for all intents and purposes has made himself an afterthought, one who is lost in his own web of lies and fairy tales, one whose outrageous claims and unsubstantiated charges invite mockery and disbelief.

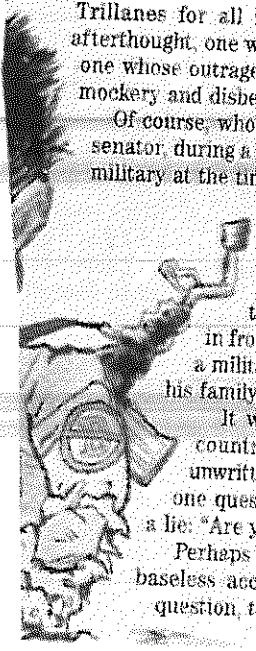
Of course, who would ever forget that time when the abrasive senator, during a Senate hearing on corruption allegations in the military at the time of then Armed Forces Chief of Staff Angelo

Reyes, bluntly told the latter, his senior mistah at the Philippine Military Academy, that he had no reputation to protect.

The confrontation must have affected Reyes too much that two weeks later he shot himself in front of the grave of his mother, a tragic ending to a military officer who had promised not to besmear his family's name.

It was also a sad tale of two graduates of the country's premier military school which has an unwritten rule of never ratting on a mistah and where one question is asked to make sure one is not telling a lie: “Are you alright, Sir?”

Perhaps with his history of telling blatant lies and baseless accusations, Trillanes ought to be asked this question, too: Are you alright Mr. Senator?



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# President Xi Jinping in the PH



Diplomatic rituals marked the last two weeks, as President Rodrigo Duterte spent last week at two very important conferences – ASEAN in Singapore and APEC in Papua New Guinea – marking each leg a tremendous success amid the hectic schedule and brief power naps. President Duterte followed the usual routine like clockwork. This included having group photos with country leaders, issuing strong comments on pressing issues, signing agreements for the benefit of the Philippines, deepening bilateral relations with specific countries and most importantly, meeting with local Filipino communities that gave him resounding welcome akin to a rock star.

These conferences served as worthy opening acts to what was in store for the Philippines the following week – the rocking state visit of President Xi Jinping of the Republic of China from 20 to 21 November. The visit drew the attention of the world and the public since it was done amid the recent exchange of barbs by President Xi and US Vice President Mike Pence at the APEC Meeting on the territorial issues over the West Philippine Sea (WPS) where the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam and Malaysia are all very much involved.

Not wasting any time on this matter, President Xi went first to Brunei, bringing with him promises of economic development for often of Brunei, the smallest of the claimant countries. This was then stepped up with the state visit to friendly Philippines where the same issue again hovered over all the scheduled meetings and lavish ceremonies.

Upon his arrival on 20 November, President Xi was whisked to Malacañang Palace to meet President Duterte and his daughter Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte to sign several key memoranda of understanding and agreements which included among other things, joint agreements regarding the Belt and Road Initiative, joint exploration for oil and gas reserves and several infrastructure developments. Of all that was signed, may I mention that I am most hopeful for the contract on the North-South Rail Project, something that we badly need.

In the evening, President Xi was treated to the traditional state dinner, an event fit for China's paramount leader, who was ranked by *Forbes Magazine* as the most powerful and influential person in the world. The dinner was attended by the country's who's who in politics, and social media was flooded with selfies and videos of Lea Salonga serenading our Chinese guests, alongside posts about gridlock in Bonifacio Global City due to the lockdown surrounding Shanghai at the Fort

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President Duterte spent last week at two very important conferences – ASEAN in Singapore and APEC in Papua New Guinea – marking each leg a tremendous success amid the hectic schedule and brief power naps. President Duterte followed the usual routine like clockwork. This included having group photos with country leaders, issuing strong comments on pressing issues, signing agreements for the benefit of the Philippines, deepening bilateral relations with specific countries and most importantly, meeting with local Filipino communities that gave him resounding welcome akin to a rock star.”

Xi... was remarkably smart with his words... His factual reactions and bodily movements showed sincerity in concern and purpose.



QUO VADIS Daren M. de Jesus



Manila, Xi's chosen hotel.

“  
*The Philippines is economically ready to answer whatever debt, monetary or otherwise, may arise due to our relations with China.*

Arthur Yap, Reps. Frederick Siao and Dennis Laogan and former Speaker and Chair of the Committee on Foreign Relations Rep. Sonny Belmonte.

During the discussion, President Xi emphasized the important role that Congress plays at this historic point in Chinese and Philippine relations and acknowledged the membership of Speaker Arroyo as an elected board director of the Boao Forum in Asia, also known as the “Asian Davos,” which is tasked in forwarding regional economic integration. As expected, the WPS issue was passed upon where President Xi stated a peaceful and cooperative approach would be best to discuss anything regarding the territorial claims of the involved countries.

The next day, former President and House Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Senate President Tito Sotto and their colleagues from Congress met with President Xi at his hotel for a brief discussion, a strategic political move by the Chinese, as he spent the evening with the Executive branch, then the following morning with the Legislative branch. Speaker Arroyo picked his entourage well, as she was joined by House members of Chinese descent: Deputy Speaker

Perhaps the most memorable and personal remark made by President Xi was he was the vice mayor of Xiamen in 1988 when former President Corazon Aquino visited it to trace her Chinese ancestry. Coincidentally Belmonte was a member of the Philippine delegation at that time. This further highlighted the shared history and cultural heritage that the Philippines and China have.

On a personal note, may I share that I have attended a number of meetings and events between Chinese and Filipinos. What struck me about President Xi is that he was remarkably smart with his words, and he sharply acknowledged the specific statements made by Senate President Sotto and Speaker Arroyo. His facial reactions and bodily movements showed sincerity in concern and purpose, showing an aura of ease, contrary to our stereotypical image of a hardworking Chinese man that is no-nonsense and uptight. He was always smiling, like a father figure, ready to extend a helping hand.

Of course, we must be wary of the Chinese gifts we receive. In politics, may it be in local or world arena, there is never a free lunch. Yet, this writer is of the opinion that our leaders are aware of this and the Philippines is economically ready to answer whatever debt, monetary or otherwise, may arise due to our relations with China. But first, let's try to tone down our inflation and tighten our belts in the meantime.

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## EDITORIAL

### A new era of peace, progress in Mindanao

**T**AUSUGS played a major role in the effort to set up the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Deputy Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Nabil Tan said this weekend, following a series of forums held in Jolo, Sulu, as part of the preparations for the plebiscite on January 21, 2019, to ratify the law creating the region.

The Bangsamoro Organic Law, he said, is based on all the peace agreements between the government and the Moro fronts – the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – and reflects the aspirations of the Moro people for genuine political autonomy.

It is reassuring to hear these words from Tan and other Tausug leaders who are members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, in view of apprehensions that the BARMM, for which the MILF fought a long-running fight against government forces, may not have the same measure of support from the MNLF of Nur Misuari, a Tausug leader from Western Mindanao.

During the months that President Duterte talked with the MILF leaders on the proposed Bangsamoro region espoused by the MILF, he said he hoped to convince Misuari to join the talks – “so that if there are corrections or maybe additions or provisions that would not sit well with the Tausugs and the rest of the southern part of Mindanao, maybe we realize altogether the friction of the MILF, MNLF, and the rest of Mindanao.”

Misuari had served many years as governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), established during the administration of President Corazon Aquino as provided for in the 1987 Constitution. The ARMM will now be replaced by the BARMM upon ratification this January.

The people of five provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-tawi, and the cities of Marawi, Lamitan, Cotabato, and Isabela, along with six towns in Lanao del Norte and 39 barangays in North Cotabato, Basilan, and Sulu are due to vote in the plebiscite.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, there are 3.45 million Muslims and around 320,000 Christians in the ARMM, who will make up the bulk of the population of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. Last September, Moro and Christian religious leaders, along with leaders of the Moro revolutionary fronts, gathered in Davao City for a peace dialogue and signed a manifesto to make “inclusive peace and progress in the future Bangsamoro government an imperative undertaking so that no sector and community will be left out of the process.”

With all these expressions of support from the various groups that make up the Bangsamoro region, we look forward to a new era of peace and progress in this part of the country, which we all hope will go a long way in correcting the historical injustice the Moro people have suffered over the centuries. 6

## EDITORIAL

## Bagong panahon ng kapayapaan, pag-unlad sa Mindanao

**M**ALAKI ang ginampanang tungkulin ng mga Tausug sa paglikha ng bagong Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), sinabi ni Deputy Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Nabil Tan kamakadiri, sa pagdiraas ng serye ng mga palihan sa Jolo, Sulu, bilang bahagi ng paghahanda sa plebisito sa Enero, 21, 2019, para sa pagratipika ng batas na lunulikha ng rehiyon.

Ang Bangsamoro Organic Law, aniya, ay base sa lahat ng kasunduang pangkapayapaan sa pagitan ng pamahalaan at ng Moro front – ang Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) at ang Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – at naglalarawan sa hangarin ng mga Moro para sa isang tiyak na pulitikal na kalayaan.

Isang kasiguraduhan ang marinig ang mga salitang ito mula kay Tan at sa ibang mga lider ng Tausug na miyembro ng Bangsamoro Transition Commission, bilang pagtingin sa mga pangamba na ang BARMM, na matagal nang ipinaglalaman sa MILF sa puwersa ng pamahalaan, ay hindi makatanggap ng katumbas na suporta mula sa MNLF ni Nur Misuari, isang pinuno ng Tausug sa Kaniurang Mindanao.

Noong mga panahong nakikipagpuulong si Pangulong Duterte sa mga pinuno ng MILF hinggil sa mungkahing rehiyon ng Bangsamoro na niyakap ng MILF, sinabi ng Pangulo na umiwas siyang makumbinsi si Misuari na makilahok sa usapan – “so that if there are corrections or maybe additions or provisions that would not sit well with the Tausugs and the rest of the southern part of Mindanao, maybe we realize altogether the friction of the MILF, MNLF, at ng natitirang bahagi ng Mindanao.”

Maraming taong naguilbi si Misuari bilang gobernador ng Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), na itinatag noong panahon ng administrasyon ni Pangulong Corason Aquino, na itinatag ng Konstitusyon ng 1987. Ang ARMM ay papalitan ngayon ng BARMM sa ratipikasyon nito sa Enero.

Nakatakdang bumoto sa plebisito ang mga mamamayan ng limang probinsiya ng Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, at Tawi-tawi, at ang mga lungsod ng Marawi, Lanao, Cotabato, at Isabela, kasama ng anim ng bayan ng Lanao del Norte at 39 na barangay ng North Cotabato, Basilan at Sulu.

Ayon sa Philippine Statistics Authority, mayroong nasa 3.45 milyong Muslim at nasa 320,000 Kristiyano sa ARMM, na bubuo sa populasyon ng bagong Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. Niting Setyembre, nagtipun-tipon ang mga Moro at Kristiyanang lider ng rehiyon, kasama ng mga pinuno ng rebolusyunaryo grupo ng mga Moro, sa lungsod ng Davao para sa isang pangkapayapaang talakayan kasama ng paglagda sa isang manifesto upang magkaroon ng “inclusive peace and progress in the future Bangsamoro government an imperative undertaking so that no sector and community will be left out of the process.”

Sa lahat ng mga pahayag na ito ng suporta mula sa iba't ibang grupo na bumubuo ng rehiyon ng Bangsamoro, hangad natin ang isang bagong panahon ng kapayapaan at pag-unlad sa bahaging ito ng bansa, na inaasahan nating malayo ang mararating sa pagtatama ng mga in hustisya ng kasaysayan na dinanas ng mga Moro sa mga nagdaang siglo.



**SENTIDO  
KOMUN**  
Celso Lagmay

## Tanikala ng girian

**A**NUMAN ang sabihin ng sinuman, ang pagtungo ni Chairman Al Hadj Murad Ebrahim ng Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) sa Camp Aguinaldo sa Quezon City ay mistulang lumagot sa tanikala ng girian, wika nga, na nagiging balakid sa paglatamo ng kapayapaan sa Mindanao - at sa ating bansa sa kabuuan. Isipin na lamang na ang pinakamataas na lider ng naturang grupo ay yumapak sa kauna-unahang pagkakataon sa teritoryo ng mga sundalo na

laging nakakasagupa ng noon ay tinaguriang mga rebeldeng Muslim, labanan ng mga kapwa Pilipino na nagiging dahilan ng pagdanak ng dugo.

Ang makasaysayang pagbisita ni Murad sa Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) headquarters-- at ng kanyang pakikipagkita kay AFP Chief of Staff Carlito Galvez, Jr. - ay marapat lamang tularan ng iba pang mga grupo na hanggang ngayon ay naghahasik pang mga panliligalig sa mga komunidad. Walang katapusang paghikayat ang kailangan upang ang Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Maute Group at iba pa ay makitsa na sa mga adhikain ng MILF. Panahon na upang talikuran nila ang malagim na pakikidigma sa mga tropa ng pamahalaan na walang ibang pakay kundi

pangalagaan ang katahimikan ng sambayanan.

Kunghindi ako nagkakamali, si Chairman Nur Misuari ng Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) ay paulit-ulit na ring nakipagkita kay Pangulong Duterte upang ipahayag ang kanyang pagsuporta sa mga pagsisikap na matamo ang tinatawag na lasting peace sa kapuluan. Nakalulungket nga lamang na may mga pagkakataon na ang minsan ding tinaguriang mga MNLF rebels - kabilang na ang ilang miyembro ng MILF, BIFF at iba pa-- ay nadadawit pa rin sa karumal-dumal na mga krimen na tulad ng kidnap-for-ransom at iba pa. Malinut na naupit sa ganitong mga anyo ng kriminalidad ang mismong mga sibilyan na tahimik lamang na namumuhay.

Panahon na rin upang makipagdaupang-palad ang tinagurian ding mga Communist rebels na dekadang na ring nakikidigma sa mga tropa ng gobyerno. Marapat lamang samantalahin ng mga lider ng Communist Party of the Philippines / National Democratic Front / New People's Army (CPP / NDF / NPA) ang mistulang pakikipagyakapan sa kamila ng Duterte administration. Isang magandang palatandaan ang pahayag ng Malacanang, na sina Luis Jalandoni at Fidel Agcaoli ay hindi aarestuhin sa kanilang pag-uwi sa bansa para sa isang informal peace talks.

Sa pagpapamalas ng gayong mga pagsisikap, kailangan ding magpamalas ng katapatan ang naturang mga grupo - Muslim rebels, Communist

groups at ang mismong gobyerno -sa pagbalangkas ng makatotohanang mga kasunduan, katapatang walang kaakibat na pagkukunwari at pagtataksil upang matamo ang tunay na pangmatagalang kapayapaan, upang tuluyang malagot ang tanikala ng girian na nagbubunga ng patayan ng kapwa mga Filipino. 7

# ONLINE NEWS

## 23 NOVEMBER 2018

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### Lorenzana slams Joma's slur vs. military, police

By Priam Nepomuceno

**MANILA** -- Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Thursday berated Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Maria "Joma" Sison for his insulting comments against the military and the police, whom he accused of being behind the cancellation of his representatives' visit to Manila.

"In his recent statement, Mr. Joma Sison said that 'threats have been made by the armed minions of (President Rodrigo) Duterte against Luis Jalandoni and Coni Ledesma. They have therefore decided not to go to Manila.' Mr. Sison is trying his damndest best to have his subalterns meet with the President and yet, at the same time, throws an insulting remark. This shows his lack of respect for the President," he added.

Also, the term "minion", which Sison used to disparage the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police is insulting as it is a term of contempt.

"It means a servile, fawning, and an unimportant person who is at the beck and call of a powerful person. This is a great insult to our police and military officers and personnel who are doing their jobs with utmost dedication and professionalism in serving the Filipino people," the DND chief added.

Lorenzana also views the remark as an insult to President Rodrigo Duterte.

"Mr. Sison's insult will only make the police and military dig in and oppose any overtures of peace talks from the National Democratic Front. It is so typical of Mr. Sison to always put the blame on the government for a decision only they themselves made," he added.

The DND chief also emphasized that Jalandoni and Ledesma's refusal to return to the Philippines is not a loss to the government.

"After all, it is not the government that is desperate to resume peace talks with the NDF (National Democratic Front). It is also not to government that is losing a large number of fighters because of the effectiveness of the localized peace talks and the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP)," he added.

Lorenzana stressed that E-CLIP has reaped successes in just four months since its implementation through the convergence of assistance from national and local government agencies working together under the banner of Task Force "Balik-Loob".

*"Ang higit na mahalaga sa amin ay ang pagbabalik sa lipunan ng mga natitira pang miyembro ng CPP-NPA at Militia ng Bayan, lalo na ngayong Pasko, upang mamuhay nang mapayapa at maligaya sa piling ng kanilang minamahal na pamilya* (What is important to us are the return of the remaining CPP-NPA members to the fold of law, especially this

*By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride.*

Christmas, for them to be able to live a peaceful and happy life with their families)," the DND chief added. **(PNA)**

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## DepEd condemns killing of teacher, wounding of pupil in Bulacan

By Ma. Teresa Montemayor

**MANILA** -- The Department of Education (DepEd) said it "does not condone such display of violence in schools", referring to the shooting incident that killed an elementary teacher and wounded a pupil in Bulacan.

In a statement late Wednesday, DepEd assured the public that it is consistently working with law enforcement agencies and strengthening necessary measures to ensure that schools continue to be a safe environment for its personnel and learners.

Reports said 40-year-old Ruperto Datwin, a member of the Philippine Army, shot to death his live-in-partner Melody Esber, 33, a teacher at the Tambubong Elementary School.

Datwin killed himself after shooting Esber at her chest with a handgun in front of her pupils, where nine-year-old Raine Julian was wounded on his shoulder during the incident.

DepEd extended its deepest condolences to the bereaved family of Esber and Datwin. It also confirmed that Julian was wounded and is now in stable condition.

The rest of Esber's students who witnessed the crime are now undergoing psychological debriefing facilitated by the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Bulacan's medical team.

"The SDO of Bulacan, in close coordination with the Philippine National Police-Bulacan, is conducting an investigation on the motive of the suspect. Officials of Tambubong Elementary School have already reached out to the victim's family to identify and provide the necessary assistance," the department said. *(PNA)*

# DND, ARMSCOR to manufacture 50K .45-caliber pistols

By Priam Nepomuceno

**MANILA** -- The Department of National Defense (DND) and ARMSCOR Global Defense Incorporated have signed a contract for the manufacture of 50,000 .45 caliber high-capacity pistols for the use of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

In a statement Wednesday, DND spokesperson Arsenio Andolong said the contract was formally signed by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and ARMSCOR president and chief executive officer, Martin Tuason, to start production of the weapons.

He added that this collaboration between the DND and ARMSCOR is in line with the DND's efforts towards "witnessing a Rebirth of Defense Self-Reliance."

"This initiative of optimizing our local resources contributes to the development of our economic and labor industries by providing jobs for Filipinos and contributing to economic growth - positive effects that far outweigh DND's spending in importation. The SND (Secretary of National Defense) also stated that 'it signifies a trust in our own country's craftsmanship and expertise'," Andolong stressed.

Meanwhile, Tuason, in his speech, emphasized his support for the defense sector.

"I look forward to making more guns, more ammunition and more products that we can do here in the Philippines as we progress. ARMSCOR backs the Filipino people and we support the AFP," he added. Both parties believe that this partnership will set the standard for future projects of the government in procuring local materials. *(PNA)*